ALL STAR ISSUE!

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Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

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BRIAN LUMLEY • LISA TUTTLE
FRITZ LEIBER • TED WHITE • PHILIP LATHAM
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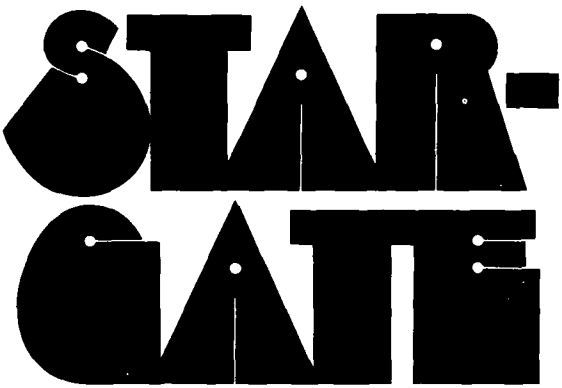

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Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

ALL STAR ISSUE

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TED WHITE editorial

APOLOGIES & EXPLANATIONS: My apologies to those of you who may have felt short-changed, last issue, by the very short editorial and the absense of our usual letter column. Something happened to these in transit to the typesetter, and I was required to write a hasty replacement for the editorial, while an added story took up the slack where the letters should have been.

Early reactions to my editorial suggest that its humor was lost on a few of you. I had written a detailed impression of the 1976 World SF Convention in Kansas City, and when it was lost I hadn't the heart (nor time) to fully rewrite it; my remarks on the "Heinlein simulacrum" were the result. Several readers have accused me of bad taste and inappropriate levity. They note that Mr. Heinlein has had to deal with serious health problems in the last year, and feel that I should have taken that into account.

For those of you who share that opinion, I recommend my editorial in the March issue of our companion publication, AMAZING SF. With the extra time available I was able to reconstruct my original editorial and thus what you should have read here in our February issue appeared instead a month later in AMAZING.

PROSPECTIVE AUTHORS: Periodically I receive letters in which the writer inquires about the roads available to professional publication for their stories. Here's the latest, neatly hand-written on notebook paper:

Fellows,

I, like many others, am in lack of info as to how I might get a sword & sorcery story published in yours or any other magazine/book. There are probably already enough new authors (not to mention long-timers) contributing such type-written manuscripts but I'm still on an edge since (believe this) I've wanted to write just this type of art (pardon) before I was twelve (now 18).

Still, this ignoramic feeling I keep getting makes me wonder if anyone reads letters anymore (especially hand-written ones) so here's to you & FANTASTIC.

David L. Ray
Springfield, Mo. 65803

If I answered every letter like this one personally, I'd have little time for anything else, so I try to answer such letters publicly, from time to time, in hopes of reaching all of you who ask these questions with a single reply. And obviously it's That Time again.

David Ray doesn't ask any really specific questions, which both simplifies and complicates any answer I might give him. But his letter, while neatly handwritten, does underscore one basic point: In order to sell fiction professionally, you must have access to a typewriter. Manuscripts simply *must* be typed, in the usual double-spaced manuscript form.

(cont. on page 119)

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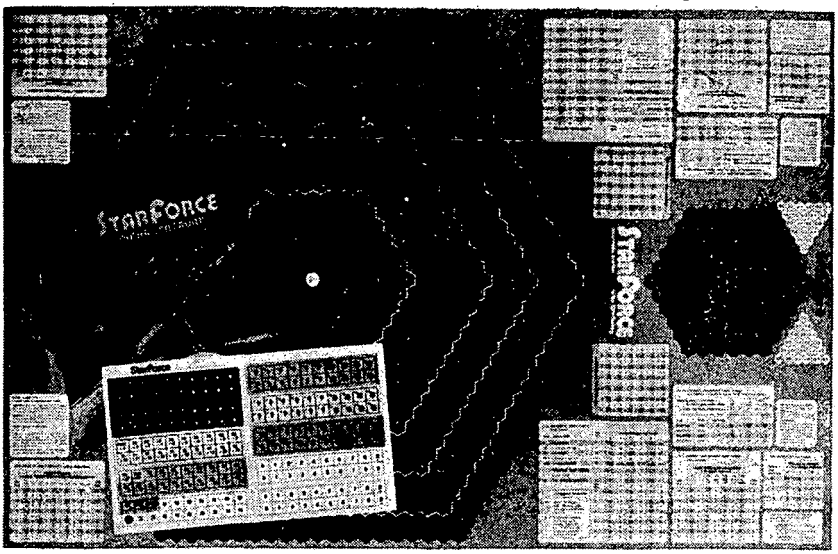

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In his guest-appearance in this issue's Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers, *Lin Carter discusses the famous Harold Shea fantasies of the 1940's. When Marvin Kaye's "The Incredible Umbrella" appeared here last year (February, 1976) it was greeted by fantasy fans as the first new work in many a year to evoke the memory of Harold Shea. In that story we met J. Adrian Fillmore and followed him into a Gilbert & Sullivan universe—from which he was forced to make a hasty exit. Now we join him for his further Incredible Adventures in—*

THE FLIGHT OF THE UMBRELLA

MARVIN KAYE

Exegesis

"• • • A LONG, heavy pole that ended in a large flounce of some silky material emblazoned with orange-and-yellow stripes on which various cabalistic symbols seemed to dance in pastel figurations. It was clearly an umbrella, but its size was rather impractical: too large for everyday use, too small for beach-basking . . ."

When J. Adrian Fillmore (Gad, how he detests that name!) bought the odd-looking bumbershoot, he had no idea it would whisk him away from his prosaic daily routine as a professor of English literature, American drama and Shakespeare at Parker College in mid-Pennsylvania and plant him smack-dab in the middle of a Gilbert and Sullivan cosmos.

The incredible umbrella was obviously some kind of dimensional-transfer engine, and it operated by universal laws he could but dimly discern. But after undergoing several harrowing adventures as a fugitive from the pirates of Penzance, the crew of the H. M. S. Pinafore, the ex-daughter-in-law-elect of The Mikado, and finally the entire British legal establishment, J. Adrian Fillmore found himself safely ensconced in the home of the umbrella's manufacturer, John Wellington Wells, the very sorcerer named in the title of the third Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.

The first thing the scholar demanded was why the umbrella took him to G&S-land and then refused to function again.

Said Wells: "I didn't plan it that way. But apparently there are physical laws governing it. You've got to finish a sequence. You have to follow some basic block of activity . . ."

J. Adrian Fillmore nodded. "My adventures followed the developing logic of an operetta. I had to solve the chief plot dilemma before the finale could be obtained, and the umbrella

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

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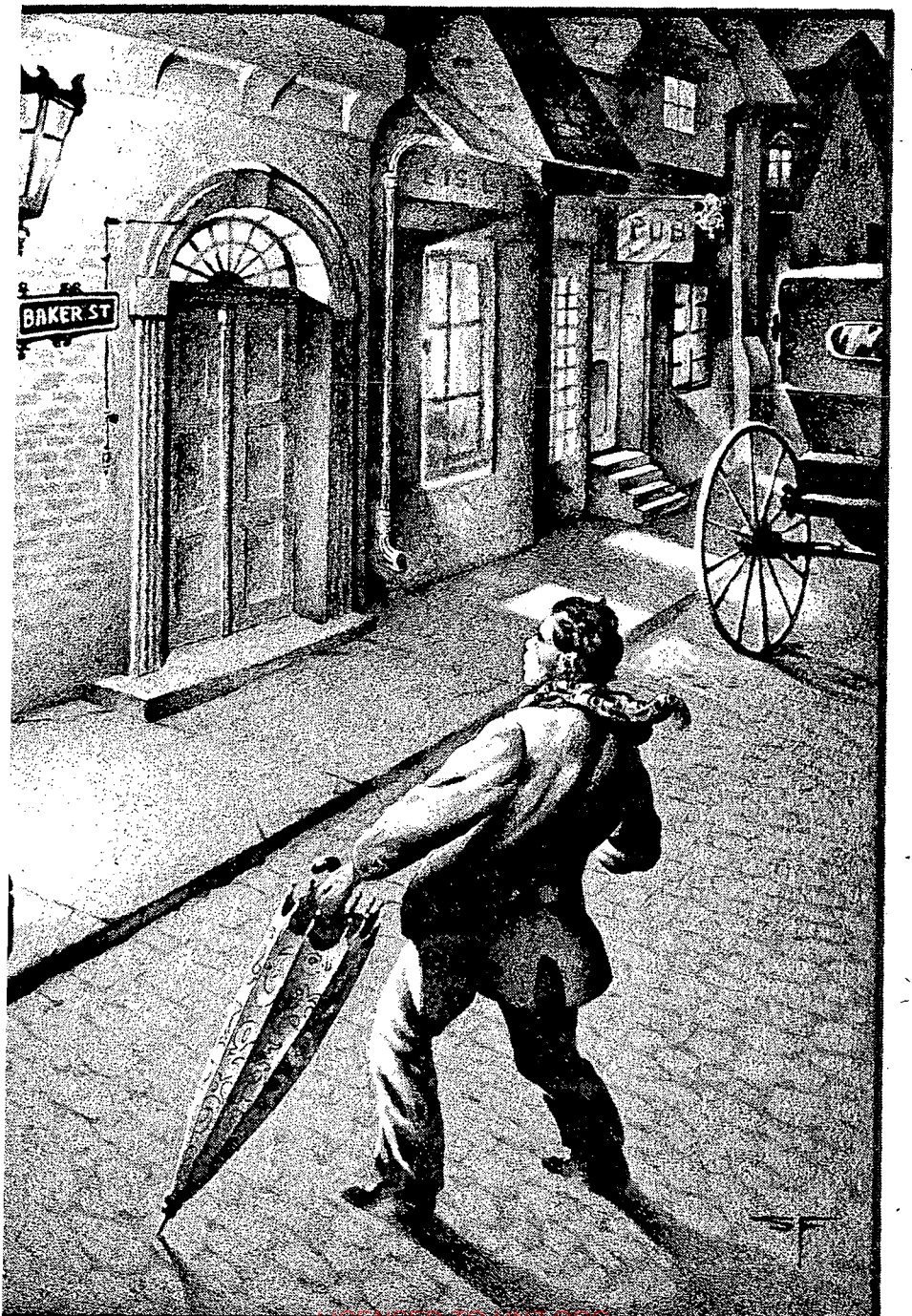

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would work again."

During his struggles to get free of his various predicaments, Fillmore began to take part in the logic of the G&S cosmos: he sang, just as the natives did . . . and there lay his chief danger.

"Subsumption," said the sorcerer. "There is a fine line between participation and total involvement. You were beginning to accept the axioms and tenets upon which my world is formulated. A little more singing and you could have found yourself permanently stuck here."

"But why did you engineer such a danger into your umbrella?"

"I didn't. The instrument operates on principles and universal dictums that I've never been able to completely pin down. One time I wafted myself into an alien universe by magic and spied a master mathematician explaining the principles of this very device to an associate. It was beyond my comprehension. But when I heard what purpose the inventor had in mind, I stole the umbrella, brought it back to my own clime, and analyzed the working parts sufficiently to manufacture it for discreet, serious people who wish to go to other, better lands . . ."

Fillmore realized that he had been thinking about his thesis on Gilbert and Sullivan at the moment he first pushed the button of the umbrella. Normally, Wells pointed out, the machine would take its possessor to the cosmos desired in his thoughts.

"But participation in other climes will be vastly different from this world. It won't always be so obvious as to what may ensnare you permanently."

The scholar picked up his umbrella, determined to go someplace where he would not be constantly put upon, a victim, but the sorcerer warned him that man tends to remain stable in whatever dimension he inhabits.

"D'you know where you wish to go now?" asked Wells.

"Yes. I want to seek out the one man who could unriddle the mystery of this umbrella."

"Which mystery are you talking about?"

"Why it takes the user to literary, rather than actual dimensions," Fillmore stated.

"Well, as to that, this world is real enough to me," the sorcerer protested, "and I have no idea what you mean when you refer to it as a gilbertandsullivan place . . . but, pray explain: What enlightened genius could possibly unravel the enigma of my marvelous umbrella?"

The sorcerer's curiosity remained unsatisfied. At the very moment he posed the question, there came a fierce rap at his front door. Fillmore looked to see who it was—and blanched.

During his misadventures, he had won the affections of Ruth, the rather bloodthirsty piratical-maid-of-all-work who spent her best, and second-best, and least-worst years marauding with the Penzance buccaneers. Ruth mistook Fillmore's intentions and thought he wanted to marry her.

As soon as he saw her at the sorcerer's door, the professor pressed the button of the dimensional-transfer machine and disappeared.

THERE WERE two people at the front door: Ruth, and a small, bald-headed civil servant, dry in manner and parched of spirit.

"Subpoena for one J. Adrian Fillmore," said the wizened functionary.

"On what charge?"

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"What else?" Ruth snapped. "Breach of promise of marriage!"

"Oh, dear," the sorcerer mumbled to himself, "another sequence! I *do* hope he got away in time . . ." *But Fillmore's thoughts were confused when he pressed the umbrella catch. Vivid memories of Ruth throwing herself upon him at the conclusion of his trial in Old Bailey crowded his brain, and muddled the process of selection.*

And what was worse, he knew nothing then of the principle of universal economy . . .

Chapter One

ALL AFTERNOON, the equinoctial gales whipped London with elemental violence. The wan October sun, obscured by hueless clouds, shed pallid light but little warmth. Winds screamed down avenues and alleys, while at the window-panes, a driving rain beat a merciless tattoo. It was as if all the destructive forces of Nature had foregathered, penned beasts, to howl at and threaten mankind through the protecting bars of *his* cage, civilization.

As evening drew in, the storm waned, though the wind still moaned and sobbed in the eaves like a child-ghost whimpering in a spectral schoolroom. From the Thames, great curlings of fog billowed forth, obscuring the green aits and meadows, creeping up alleys and mews, blanketing the city in an impenetrable miasma. Amber streetlamps glowed feebly in the mist-shroud like the eyes of the corpses. Few foot-travelers ventured out in the mud, and the only sound heard on some streets was the occasional rhythmic clip-clop and simultaneous metallic squeal of a passing Hansom.

Newman Street was deserted and smothered by the river-vapor. The mud was so thick and the appurtenances of inhabitation so difficult to discern that one might well believe a Stegosaurus could wander along its morass-like reaches. But at precisely ten past nine, a less impressive figure suddenly appeared on the empty thoroughfare: a smallish, somewhat stocky man.

His footsteps echoed down the street and he stalked along for a time before assaying a cross-street. He was inadequately dressed in a gray woolen suit with ascot tucked in at the throat. He was hatless and wore no topcoat. Though he carried an umbrella in one hand, he made no effort to use it as a shield from the steady drizzle.

Up one alley, down another, past shadowy blocks of homes, tenements, commercial establishments, the solitary pedestrian walked, his collar turned up and his head bowed. He hunched his shoulders, but the rain soaked into the material he wore on his back, ran down and squelched soddenly in his shoes, making the toes of his socks into sopping sponges. Once he stepped into a puddle deep enough to drown a cat. Shivering, he extricated his foot and forlornly tried to wring the excess moisture from his trouser-leg.

Turning into Lombard Street, he spied the lights of a distant tavern. He huddled into a covered entranceway and fished in his pocket for his wallet. Finding it, he counted over the meager currency therein: roughly $34 in U. S. dollars that had been generously converted to pounds sterling by his benefactor, John Wellington Wells. But would it be usable in this cosmos? And did he, in fact, reach the very place he'd been meaning to visit?

Fillmore meditated briefly, made a

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decision, then stepped off in the direction of the far-off inn.

After a few moments more of slogging though mud and the rain, he drew near to the place. A sign suspended from an iron scrolled arm set at right angles to the bricks above the tavern-door proclaimed the name of the establishment:

THE GEORGE AND VULTURE

That disturbed him. But he wiped off his shoes on the small bracket for that purpose set next to the steps and went inside, grateful to get out of the wetness.

THE TAP-ROOM was sparsely populated that evening. A trio of gamesters took turns at the dart-borad, and an elderly, kindly-looking gentleman with a bit of a paunch sat at a corner table taking supper with a young, dandyish companion. The only other individual in the room when the drenched itinerant entered was the bartender.

Fillmore's bedraggled condition drew quizzical glances from the dart throwers, but they said nothing. Approaching the bar, he held out a pound-note and ascertained from the bewildered tapster that it was, indeed, acceptable tender. The new comer then ordered a pint of ale.

"Bit of a foul night for a stroll," observed the bartender as he set the libation on the polished counter-top before his customer.

The stranger nodded, downing a quarter of the brew at one gulp. Wiping his mouth, he eyed the bartender quizzically, then motioned to him.

"I say, would you mind very much if I asked you a question?"

"Of course not."

"Even if it seems a trifle peculiar?"

The tapster grinned, placed his hands flat on the counter-top and leaned over to his customer. "If," he said in a low voice, "you think aught can surprise me after twenty-year of tavern-tending, ye've much to learn. Ask away."

"Well . . . this *is* London, isn't it?"

"George Yard, right enough."

"Well and good, but—" Fillmore shrugged. "Well, what I want to know is this: what year is this?"

"Why, 'ninety-five," the other replied, a bit nonplussed in spite of his assurances.

"Yes, yes," Fillmore nodded impatiently, "but—do you mean *eighteen* ninety-five?"

The bartender swallowed, wet his lips and took a breath before trusting himself to affirm the century. Then he found a reason to busy himself at the opposite end of the tavern.

Fillmore slowly sipped his ale, oblivious to the muted buzz that rose when the tapster began to talk to the dart-players. He ignored their collective gaze, and busied himself moistening his interior and wondering how to dry off his exterior.

A tap on his shoulder. The dandyish gentleman stood by his side.

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Snodgrass—"

(Fillmore's ill-defined fears began to take shape.)

"I beg to be forgiven for invading your privacy but my companion and I, you see, could not help but notice your somewhat uncomfortable condition. My friend is the most compassionate of men and wishes to make your acquaintance and perhaps assist you in your putative predicament."

The stranger thanked Snodgrass and followed him back to the table at the rear of the room, where the elderly, portly gentleman in cutaway, gaiters and ruffled shirt rose to take his

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hand in greeting. With his other hand, he adjusted the rimless pince-nez upon the broad bridge of his nose and smiled.

"Pleased to meet a fellow scholar," he said, upon perusing Fillmore's Parker College business card. "Eh? What? Bless me, yes, quite right, you heard correctly, that *is* my name. I daresay what little reputation I may have established is not the least bit tainted with the calumnies of false report. But sit you down, sir, sit you down and dry off as you may. Won't you share some of this excellent cold beef? And allow me to refill your tankard?"

Fillmore thanked him mightily, and set to with a will, not to mention a hearty appetite. His last meal had been in prison, awaiting trial at Old Bailey. The meat and ale were so excellent that he did not permit the trifle of a possible mislocation of cosmoses to upset him.

After he'd made a clean sweep of a quarter of the beef and had his glass refilled twice, Fillmore apologized for interrupting the dinner colloquy of his host.

"Bless my soul," said the old gentleman, "this is in no way an interruption, my good sir. Mr. Snodgrass here, who *is*, by the way—"

"A poet," observed Fillmore.

The old man's eyebrows raised. "Goodness, does his reputation, too, precede him? How *did* you know his occupation? I had thought he'd yet to be published!"

The scholar shrugged. "Oh, it's a bit of a fey quality that I have, I fancy."

"Well, well," the other chuckeled, "I am suitably impressed. But, as I say, Mr. Snodgrass here is a capital poet—"

"My blushes," the other simpered.

"Now, Augustus, modesty ill becomes a man of true genius. You are a servant of the Muse and there is glory there! At any rate," said the host, turning to his guest, "my friend here is somewhat concerned with an affair of the heart, and I had thought to give him proper advice . . . which, indeed, I did. As I completed my statement, my attention was drawn to note your extremely dampish plight. And how, if I may be so bold, do you manage to be out on such a night as this without adequate protection? I presume your umbrella must be damaged; else it should have shielded you more efficiently from the elemental deluge."

"Well," Fillmore said, somewhat reluctantly, "I do not know whether I should repay your generosity with a rehearsal of my predicament. It is so wild a tale you would doubtless judge me madder than King Lear."

The consequence of this remark was for Fillmore's host and the poet to positively entreat his adventures. So the stranger at length embarked upon his lengthy personal history, ending with his arrival on Newman street and his subsequent trek to the George and Vulture.

When he had done at last, the others sat back, their mouths agape.

"Bless my soul," said the elderly gentleman. "That is certainly the strangest romance I have ever had the privilege to audit! No mind if it be true or no—it is an history worthy of the Arabian Nights. What do you say of it, Snodgrass?"

The poet had a dreamy look in his eyes. "I see," he sighed, "a major epic, a heroic narrative. I shall apply myself this very night while the fit is still upon me!" Suddenly leaping up, he excused himself and rushed from the room.

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His companion laughed heartily, then apologized for the poet's precipitate departure. "When Inspiration descends unto his noble rhymer's brow, it ill beseemeth him to let her wait admittance until he pay the check." Still chuckling, the rotund little gentleman rose. "No matter, though, I am better conditioned than he, I can well afford it and had, indeed, meant to persuade him so." He graciously waved Fillmore to follow him.

In the lobby of the inn, he retrieved his room key, then, turning to his guest, said, "I keep rooms in this establishment. Pray let me loan you some fitting—ho, ho!—apparel, for you cannot hope to go about unnoticed in your present state. No, no! I shall hear of no polite declinings. I am very handsomely off, my good fellow, and it shall vastly please me to make a present of some necessaries with which you may better shield yourself from the raging elements . . ."

AN HOUR LATER, the two descended the stairs to the lobby. Fillmore, dry and warm in slightly loose-fitting apparel, carried an oilskin bag beneath his arm. In it was his sopping clothing. Over his arm, the inoperable umbrella dangled.

As they neared the front door, the scholar whispered to his host, but that person vigorously shook his head.

"I repeat, positively not, sir! Your entertaining tale is ample payment enow for these scraps of cloth you've accepted. I urge you to keep your monies for a more pressing use. Why, if your story be true, you have but a few odd pound-notes on your person!" His eyes twinkled as he "humored" his guest.

At the door, Fillmore asked directions to his ultimate destination, and feared it did not exist. But the old man's answer allayed his doubts.

"Why, indeed, that street is no great ride away, but see here, you cannot walk there on this foul night! I insist you let me fee a Hansom for your transport."

The scolar protested vigorously, but to no avail. His host, apologizing for a temporary absence of his man-servant on a family matter, himself stepped into the drizzle and smoke to hail a cab. It was no simple matter on such a night to find one, let alone flag one down in the limited visibility the fog afforded. But after much assiduous labor and much raising of the voice, the portly benefactor finally arranged for his friend's transportation.

As he entered the cab, Fillmore thanked his host repeatedly, and the other as often belittled the charity as privilege and necessary duty. Closing the cab-door, the elderly gentleman stepped around to the front of the vehicle and told the driver the proper destination. He paid him in advance.

"The address wanted," said Mr. Pickwick, "is 221 Baker Street. Just out of Marylebone Road . . ."

Chapter Two

INSIDE THE CAB, J. Adrian Fillmore tried to collect his thoughts. It was not easy because of the unaccustomed joggling and jostling his bones were receiving, but he did what he could to resolve the nagging doubts as to his whereabouts.

London it was, and the year was correct, but was it the time and situation—in short, was it the *universe*—of Sherlock Holmes?

His thoughts, confused and harried by the sight of Ruth through the front door-pane of Wells' shop, had rushed past in a chaotic jumble as he pressed

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the button to open the umbrella's hood. After that, all was a disordered kaleidoscope of colors and voids as he flew through uncomputed curvings of space. His hurried departure allowed no time to consider personal comfort. When he found himself in the middle of a dark, rainy street, Fillmore had cursed the enforced celerity of his flight. "And, damn it," he muttered in the dark interior of the lurching cab, "what stupidity made me abandon my raincoat and galoshes back on the Cornwall seacoast?"

At least, Pickwick saw to it that he would be able to survive the weather until such time as he might expand his wardrobe. But the thought of the old gentleman brought fresh dismay. He was in London all right—but it appeared to be that of Charles Dickens! The benign heroes of the *Pickwick Papers* were pleasant enough, but they hardly qualified to assist Fillmore in his cerebral quest. Besides, memories of the grimmer aspects of some of the "boz" narratives haunted him and made him most uneasy. His umbrella, ruled by cosmic quirk, would not permit him egress from this milieu until he completed a sequence of action—and Dickens' plots sometimes covered entire lifetimes. And in the meantime, what might he do inadvertently to mire himself permanently in the world of Dickens?

Was there a possibility that by some principle of universal economy, the London of Dickens was also the same world as that of Watson and Holmes? To learn the answer, the scholar was headed towards Baker Street.

"Sherlock Holmes," he mused, with a thrill of anticipation. "If anyone in the multiplicity of worlds that seem to coexist with the earth I know can analyze the umbrella, then—"

The sentiment was interrupted by the abrupt stoppage of the cab and the simultaneous hurling-forward of the passenger. He bruised his head against the edge of the opposite seat.

The driver shouted, "221 Baker." Fillmore dismounted, offering, as he did, an epithet to the cabbie in lieu of a tip.

Picking up the oilskin container of clothing, Fillmore crossed the road just as the disgruntled Hansom driver pulled away. A bit of mud spattered up from the wheels of the cab, but the scholar ignored the inconvenience in his excitement as he spied the large brass plate on the house opposite. His hopes were high as he scanned the inscription:

221
S. HOLMES, CONSULTANT
Apply at Suite B

Dashing up the steps to the front door, he pushed it open and mounted one flight. The interior was cheery, just as he'd always imagined it. Green wallpaper paralleled the staircase and the flickering of gas-lamps set in staggered sconces brightened the interior considerably.

He stopped in front of the B apartment and knocked. Almost immediately, a powerfully-built, mustached man in dressing-gown opened the door and invited him to enter.

Stepping inside, Fillmore asked, "You are the good doctor, I presume?"

"Why, yes," the other chuckled, "at least I hope to merit the appelation. But I imagine you have come to see Holmes, have you not?"

"I have, indeed," the scholar replied, his heart beating rapidly like that of a school-boy who sees his first

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love approaching.

"Sit down, my good man," the doctor invited, meanwhile pulling on a bell-rope in the corner of the cozy sitting-room where he'd ushered his caller. "The fact is, I'm afraid Holmes is off tending to that dreadful business in Cloisterham. Chap missing, you may have read about it in the papers: Drood. But it's a close undercover game Sherrinford is playing, and my presence there would only have confused things, so—"

The doctor stopped, peering at his visitor with concern. "Pray tell me, sir, are you troubled by some indisposition?"

Fillmore, pale, could barely speak. "What," he whispered, "*what* did you call Mr. Holmes?"

"Why, Sherrinford, of course! All the world knows Sherrinford Holmes, do they not? Not the least (I fancy I may compliment myself) because of the narratives which I have penned concerning his exploits."

"And what," the scholar asked, still hoarse, "and what is *your* name?"

The doctor chuckled. "The fickleness of fortune and all that, eh? I'd thought my little publications might have added some touch of notoreity to the name of Ormond Sacker, but apparently—"

Fillmore rose in agitation and paced the room, thinking feverishly. Why were the names the doctor used so nightmarishly different from the ones he'd expected to hear? Sherrinford, not Sherlock. Ormond Sacker instead of John H. Watson, M. D.

On the other hand, why did they also sound so *familiar*?

"Here, here, my good fellow," said Sacker worriedly, "I can see you are in considerable agitation. Pray be seated. Perhaps, in the absence of Holmes, I can shed some light on your problem. Meantime, I notice that the storm has not left you untainted. Be seated, be seated, man. I have rung for Mrs. Bardell and she will be up directly with tea and perhaps—"

Fillmore interrupted, even paler than before. "Mrs.—*whom*?"

"Why—Bardell, Mrs. Bardell, our landlady!" the doctor said, greatly amazed.

"*Not Mrs. Hudson?*"

"Hudson? I should think not. There used to be a Mrs. Warren taking care of this building, but she sold to a Mrs. Martha Bardell, and that is who . . . but see, the knob is turning now. This is the very woman."

The door opened and a plump woman entered, bearing an ornate silver tea-service in her arms. But when she saw Fillmore, the woman screamed and dropped the tray. The hot liquid splashed upon the rug.

"What the devil!" Sacker exclaimed. "Mrs. Bardell! Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"It's him," the woman wailed, "*it's him!*"

"What *are* you speaking about, madam?"

"Him!" she howled, pointing an accusatory finger at J. Adrian Fillmore.

He, in turn, stared in flabbergasted dismay at the landlady. She was dressed in a green housecoat with flounce sleeves of a lighter shade with vertical stripes. On her head she wore a white, lace-trimmed domestic's cap, tied in a bow beneath her chin. But despite the disparity of apparel, Fillmore recognized her immediately.

It was Ruth.

Chapter Three

PRISON. A home away from home, Fillmore mused bitterly. First, the

(cont. on page 74)

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HOW KANK THAD RETURNED TO BHUR-ESH

BRIAN LUMLEY

Although not a direct sequel to his "Tharquest and the Lamia Orbiquita" (November, 1976), Brian Lumley's new offering takes place in the same universe and is part of the cycle begun by that story. . .

Illustrated by STEVE FABIAN

Foreword

WHEN THELRED GUSTAU originally invited me to read his latest translation from Teh Atht's *Legends of the Olden Runes*, with an eye to my preparation of the work for publication, he also placed in my hands some associational information about the locale of the story and certain of its participants. This information follows:

Long before Klühn ever became the capital city of Theem'hdra—indeed, at a time when Klühn was little more than a fishing village—then, to the extreme west of the continent at the edge of the vast Unknown Ocean, in a valley girt round by the Ghost Cliffs of Shildakor, lay the city of Bhur-Esh. Two thousand years later when Klühn had grown up, Bhur-Esh, its valley, and the Ghost Cliffs too were long gone, buried beneath a lava desert; and out in the Unknown Ocean a new volcanic island stood gray, forbidding and still, silently smoking. . . But we are only interested in Bhur-Esh in its heyday.

For then the streets of the city were crowded and narrow and crooked so as to be almost labyrinthine. They were lined with shops and bazaars and brothels where merchants from all over the known world thronged to barter, buy and vend any and everything that could possibly be vended, bought or bartered. And in Bhur-Esh such merchants could carry on their businesses in almost perfect safety; because of its topography the city had very few thieves—it will be seen that they had nowhere to run!

As a self-supporting seaport and city (the inhabitants considered themselves collectively as a "nation" in their own right), Bhur-Esh was and had ever been neutral, neither attacking its neighbours nor being attacked. The pincerlike arms of the bay reaching out to the Unknown Ocean were high and sheer oceanward and well fortified within; with turrets, ramparts, arrowslits, and quarters for hundreds of soldiers; a regiment was kept there permanently. Too, in strategic places, ballistae loomed in impregnable rock-cut bastions on top of those arms, with hundreds of heavy boulders ready for the hurling.

That was one of the reasons why Bhur-Esh was neutral; the other, apparently, was the Ghost Cliffs of Shil-

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dakor. As Teh Atht himself has written: "What army except an army of wizards might broach such insurmountable barriers?" But these same barriers also worked in another way, explaining Bhur-Esh's deficiency of criminals and why, once discovered, there was no sanctuary to which they could flee. The cliffs were unscalable, the narrow mouth of the bay constantly guarded and equipped with a toll bridge.

The bay was wide at the landside and the cliff-enclosed valley was by no account small; so that while Bhur-Esh itself was a sizeable city, with suburbs sprawling eastward almost to the very feet of the sheltering Ghost Cliffs themselves, nevertheless it occupied only a twentieth part of the "kingdom".

Between the calm waters of the bay and the city's west wall fields stretched in green expanse, with farmhouses and barns scattered here and there and cattle enclosures and patchworks of growing crops, and lining these fertile fields at north and south hard-packed roads lay beneath the beetling rocks. These roads led from the barracks and quarters of King Vilthod's soldiers, on the outskirts of Bhur-Esh, to the battlements of the rocky bay arms.

The King's palace stood magnificent and serene, "a pinnacled splendour to the eye of the beholder," at the city's hub. Its walls were surrounded by cropped, luscious-green grass imported from the barbarous North, and archers sat atop the walls with crossbows of eastern design to ensure that no man walked, sat or stood upon King Vilthod's grass. For the King's grass was his pride and joy—its seed paid for grain by precious grain, nurtured to lush life and maintained by a bevy of gardeners—and the like of its

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northern green was unheard of elsewhere on the shores of the Unknown Ocean. Teh Atht tells us that: "Many an unwary stranger, perhaps fancying a juicy blade of grass to chew, had discovered a flighted bolt growing in his chest or throat before the grass could dangle from his lips. . ."

Likewise prized by the King, for its architecture and yellow-walled beauty (not to mention the money it doubtless provided his coffers, which was probably why he had built it directly behind the palace), was the High-Court of Bhur-Esh. The High-Court stood tall and golden, but not nearly so splendid as the palace, in a plaza of white-walled gardens and winding pebble paths, "between delicate fountains and airy marble statues of gods and heroes long gone." Within its spacious halls the worst members of Bhur-Esh's criminal element—few, as explained—were tried by Thamiel, Chief Seeker of Truth to the King.

Normally the main courtroom was sparsely attended: a few chroniclers with their styli and tablets; a bard or two to sing Woes or Delights after the passing of sentence or declaration of innocence; the provost guard; a smattering of out-of-work city types, and the family and friends of the sinned-against and sometimes of the transgressor. On the day of which Teh Atht tells in the following legend, however, things were very different. . .

I

NEVER BEFORE had a man the like of Kank Thad the barbarian been brought to trial at the High-Court. His crimes had been many and varied and all sorts of imputations had been brought against him in the hour or so during which his case had been heard. In fact, no case *had* been heard, merely the basic facts: that Kank Thad was accused of murder most foul and that, among other sundry offences, he had spat and done worse things on the palace-encircling grass of King Vilthod.

At the time of the latter blasphemies, some days earlier, the archer who had seen these acts had been nonplussed as to what action to take. There were edicts for sitters on the grass, and for standers or walkers upon it, but Kank Thad had done none of these things—he had merely extruded a gob of saliva grassward from the road where he stood admiring the palace. A passer-by, shocked and thinking to see the barbarian cut down at any instant, had whispered to him from a safe distance of what he did, advising him to move quickly along; whereupon Kank Thad had hailed the archer who still pondered his course of action atop the wall:

"Hey, archer on the wall!"

"Move on. . .get on with you!" the flabbergasted archer had returned.

"Archer," cried Kank Thad unperturbed. "I am told that one may neither sit nor stand nor walk upon the grass. Is this true?"

"Aye."

"And spitting?"

"There are no orders. No one has—*spat*—before on the grass!"

"And being a good archer of the King," the Northman grinned evily up at the flustered man above, "you may only act on written or spoken instructions?"

"That. . .is true. Now move on!"

"Not yet, my friend archer," answered the barbarian, whipping up his clout and wetting with a loud guffaw on Vilthod's beloved grass.

Then, before the mortified archer

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had time to aim his crossbow, the hairy great white savage had turned to stride drunkenly off down a winding street in whose tortuous coils he was soon lost to sight. That archer, a dull fellow as witness the tale, was employed atop the palace walls no longer; for having reported the occurrence to his commander he had been stripped of rank and sent to the High-Court wherein slavish, menial tasks might be found more suited to his talents. There this day he had spotted Kank Thad and brought his charge against him—one of many.

The barbarian's debts were legion. He owed taverners for ale by the gallon and meat by the platter, and a hosteler two weeks' rent for the kennel wherein he'd slept. These were among his heavier debts: his lesser ones were far more numerous.

Having at length been kicked out by the irate hosteler, he was charged with vagrancy too, and finally he was accused of murder. This being the most heinous of his deeds—barely, remembering the episode of the grass-wetting—it was the murder for which he found himself eventually called to answer.

"You have heard all against you. How say you then, barbarian? Are you innocent—or guilty of vile murder?" Thamiel asked his all-important question of the huge, chained savage before him.

Kank Thad, scarred horribly from cheek- to chin-bone down one side of his face, his left eye forever half-closed in a scar-tissue grimace, leaned against one of the carven basalt pillars to which he was manacled and grinned. His grin was evil as his aspect, square yellow teeth leering from behind hard, thin lips. A towering hulk of a man, he spat on the mosaic floor of the courtroom, tossing back his mane of jet hair—which grew, like that of all his race, in a narrow band right down to the base of his spine—before answering:

"Murder?" he scoffed. "That's a word I didn't know before I was washed up on your piddling beach when my good ship sank in the bay. And I'd never have come here if that storm hadn't forced me to seek safe harbour. Listen: in my homeland to the north, when two men fight and one wins, the victor is no murderer! Aboard my ship, if a man got spitted in a fair fight, his body went to feed the fishes and the one who lived was left to tend his scars! Murder? Of what do you speak, baggy one?"

Thamiel winced at the barbarian's words. The heavily-jowled, flabbily-bodied Seeker of Truth had put up with the iron-thewed Northman's insults all through his trial, and Thamiel's patience was running low. Still, he was a man renowned for the Perfection of his Justice, and he could be just even now—before this sea-rat died!

"You will say nothing in your defence, then?"

"I wanted a woman," the scarface answered with a shrug of his powerful shoulders, "and that one—" he pointed a shackled hand across the courtroom at a brightly daubed slut in the stalls, "was the one I wanted. I'd had her before when my money was good, and what's wrong with a bit on account, I ask you? She makes a good cushion for a boozed-up body. And I'll tell you something, you pallid sack of a man: a night with that one—why!—it would add ten years to your miserable life!" He grinned again, reconsidering that last. "—Or finish you off for good!"

Fatty folds of flesh trembling in rage, Thamiel gawped and spluttered,

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then remembered the Faultlessness of his Justice and brought himself under control. "Wench," he spoke to the girl, "you have heard all that has gone. . .have you any last words for or against Kank Thad the Northman?"

Here the barbarian believed himself to be on firm ground. Had he not praised the girl, in his way, and had he not also given her a good night that time?—and paid for it too, by Yibb! He had not taken into account the fact that he was now destitute, with only a battle-notched blade to his name; and of what use to a tavern-whore is an ugly barbarian with an insatiable lust, an empty pocket and a too-ready sword?

"That I have!" Lila the whore shrilled, her hair hanging down over her more than ample, passionately heaving bosom. "I was bought and paid for by Theen of King Vilthod's Guard, aye, and on our way upstairs in the tavern of Hethica Nid, when this—this latrine slime—took me from him!"

"*Took* you from him?" Sitting at Thamiel's right hand, Veth Nuss the Mousey spoke up in his squeaky, tremulous voice. "Took you from an Officer of the King's Guard! Didn't Theen have his sword?"

"He did, Lord," Lila answered, "but the barbarian came up behind us and plucked it from his side!"

"This was not told before," Thamiel frowned, interested despite himself and his desire to get the thing over with.

"The questions were not asked, Lord," Lila protested. "I was asked only if Kank Thad *killed* Theen—and he did!"

"Well, go on. . .go on, girl, tell it now," Thamiel urged.

"Well, the barbarian took Theen's sword and flipped it point up into the ceiling of the tavern. Theen attacked him, but—" she glanced grudgingly at Kank Thad, "the Northman is—*big*, Lord. He shrugged Theen off and laughed at him. And then—"

"So, it is true then," Thamiel broke in, "that Theen was weaponless when the barbarian struck him down?"

"Aye!" Kank Thad suddenly shouted from between his pillars, "That's true enough. Tell them, Lila, you ungrateful ratbag—tell them just how 'weaponless' the guardsman was—and may your paps rot in the telling!" He hung in his chains and roared with berserk laughter.

"As Theen—" Lila hesitantly continued when finally the giant's laughter subsided, "—as he leapt to try to regain his blade stuck high in the ceiling, Kank Thad, he—he. . ."

"Yes, girl, what did the barbarian do?" Thamiel impatiently pressed.

"He—he struck Theen a very low blow."

"Eh?" Veth Nuss the Mousey frowned and shook his head. "Can you not be plainer, wench?" he squeaked.

"I lopped away his manhood with Gutrip, my once-true sword!" Kank Thad screamed in hellish derision. "Rippied it away and flipped it to the tavern dogs from Gutrip's tip. Murder, you say? Why!—I did the man a favour in putting him out of his misery. What good's a man who can't—"

"*Silence!*" Thamiel thundered, hoisting himself puddinglike to his feet. Even the low muttering and chattering from the galleries had stopped, and white faces peered in awe and horror at the hulking, manacled barbarian in his chains. Thamiel, shaken to his soul at the loathsomeness conjured by the Northman's admittance, his composure utterly shattered now, stood with his finger

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ointing, trembling. "By your own ords—" he finally managed, "you re *guilty!*—and now I pass sen- ence. . ." He drew himself up to his ull height of five feet three inches nd, barely remembering the Unim- eachability of his Justice, said: "Let hy sword be sundered!"

II

"LET THE SWORD Gutrip be sun- lered!" the words of the Seeker of ruth were echoed to a hall outside he courtroom proper and a man, a ninor court-attendant but once an rcher of the palace walls, clad now in shift of mean cloth, laboured in nder Gutrip's weight. He was grimly miling for all his workworn appear- nce. He placed the weapon on tall narble blocks, its plain-guarded pommel on one, its point on another, its chipped middle suspended. The ex-archer raised a great iron hammer, at which Kank Thad—perhaps re- membering better days before swinish habits sank him low—hauled on his chains and roared in an agony as if he himself were being tortured.

"By Yibb, *no*, the blade is not to blame! Gutrip—" His anguished cry tapered off as the grinning court at- tendant, also remembering better days, brought down his hammer and shivered the scarred sword into a dozen flying shards.

"Gutrip—" the greater prisoner groaned low in his throat, "Oh, Gut- rip. . ."

"Let the spinning of the Silver De- cider commence!" cried Thamiel.

Again the fallen archer moved, climbing the steps of a dais in the center of the courtroom where, on a block of faceted crystal, a silver arrow balanced within a ring of rune-inscribed iron.

"Know you, Kank Thad, of the choice to be made?" Veth Nuss squeaked in his mouse-voice.

"I have a choice of punishments?" the barbarian brightened. "Yibb—but this sounds better! What choice do I have? Is one of them banishment? If so, then ban—"

"*Silence!*" Thamiel of the Meritori- ous Justice thundered again. "The choice is not yours but that of the Silver Decider. If, when the arrow stops its spinning, the point faces into the north. . .then you go north, to the Ghost Cliffs of Shildakor. If the point faces into the south—then you go south, to the Square of the Sun- dering!"

"Ghost Cliffs?" the barbarian shud- dered ever so slightly and his mane bristled all down his back at this hint of thaumaturgy. "Sundering? I like the sound of neither. Explain, O bulg- ing bilge-barrel."

"Gladly," Thamiel whispered, actu- ally smiling through the barbarian's irreverence as he thought on the Transcendence of his Justice. "The Ghost Cliffs of Shildakor stand a mile high, sheer and stark, often overhang- ing and reaching in certain seasons into the very clouds. On a clear day a man might see the top through a good glass, and some day a man might even climb to the top—but this has not happened yet. The bones and tat- ters of a thousand fallen climbers lit- ter the lower slopes. You, too, Kank Thad, might try the climb, depending upon which way the Silver Decider points."

"And the Square of the Sunder- ing?" Little of the Northman's hairy spirit remained, but he managed to retain an almost theatrical bluster even yet.

"Why, is it not obvious? The dust in the Square of the Sundering is

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brown with dried blood, barbarian, and yellow and white with the pounded bones of men quartered there between four great horses bred for the task. . ."

"Hah!" the prisoner snorted. "I've yet to see the horses that might rip a son of Kulik Thad in pieces." He flexed his mighty muscles and the heavy chains and thick manacles groaned.

"Aye," Thamiel nodded his head, "we have had such before. We don't like to see our horses tired, though, by powerful muscles. And why should such be allowed when a couple of sword thrusts in the right places can help the job along a bit? A hack at a tendon here, a thrust at a stubborn joint there—"

"Ahem. . ." Veth Nuss ahemmed, reminding Thamiel of the Utter Insurmountability of his Justice, telling him not to elaborate. The punishments were surely enough in themselves without graphic descriptions. Thamiel smiled fatly at the barbarian's new expression—then gave the man atop the dais a signal. With a metallic whisper the Silver Decider began to spin, and eventually its pointer slowed. . .and stopped!

The arrow balanced delicately, stationary on its pivot—pointing north. Kank Thad was for the cliffs!

"Away with him!" At Thamiel's command ten powerful blacks seated on a stone bench rose, split into two parties, released the chains from the pillars and dragged the struggling, cursing Northman out of the courtroom and down a passage from which his fading blasphemies echoed for a goodly while. Away they took him, away to the deepest cells in the deepest dungeons under the white walls, pebble paths, airy statues and delicate fountains of the surroundings of the High-Court of Bhur-Esh.

THUS CAME Kank Thad to the city's dungeons, and in particular to the deepest of deep cells wherein only death-sentenced criminals wait—or prowl, or howl, or pray to heathen gods or whatever—during the short, short hours of their last night on Earth. Kank Thad, however, was no howler but a son of Kulik Thad; nor was he a prowler, for he saw little sense in wearing himself out wandering to and fro in the confines of his cell when tomorrow he had a great cliff to climb; and the only god he knew was one Yibb-Tstll, who is no god to pray to but whose name may fairly be used in cursing; and so, because there seemed little else to do, the barbarian simply lay down in his cell and slept—he slept the sleep of a babe in arms until the night guard came on duty.

As fortune would have it his watchman was a Northman like himself, who first came to Bhur-Esh as a stripling stolen by swart slavers from Shadarabar in the east. Thasik Haag was a slave and a youth no longer but a greybeard now, and trusted as one whose duty is his all and holy above all other things. Thus Kank Thad's pleas—he was never one to miss out on any kind of chance, no matter how slim, in a tight spot—for the sake of the memory of northern lands with barbarous names fell on stony ground, and while he did at least wrench a tear or two from Thasik Haag's one good eye with his tales of the mammoth-plains and the great hunts of home, he could in no way conjure a desire in the heart of that worthy ancient to assist him.

Instead, and in return for the barbarian's tales of dim-remembered northern territories, his gaoler told

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him all he knew of the Ghost Cliffs of Shildakor: how Shildakor had been a wizard in unmemorial times whose adventurous son had attempted to climb the great walls surrounding Bhur-Esh and the valley—and of how the boy fell and died! The wizard had straight-way ensorcelled the cliffs, laying down a curse upon them that no man might ever climb them, that henceforward ghosts would ever inhabit their crevices and niches. . .

Too, the old man was willing to share his supper and a skin of sour wine, and later he brought out a trothyboard and counters that they might play a game or two through the bars. In this he made a fatal mistake for he was a good player, and the sons of Kulik Thad—Kank especially—are not known for sporting natures but rather for short and fiery tempers.

Towards morning, when the first light was creeping in wispy mists over the eastern cliffs of the valley, down in that deep cell the loser of many trothy games, holding to a mere snarl the bull yell of anger that had grown in his chest all night, reached through the bars and grasped his keeper's windpipe in both his hands. This had been the barbarian's plan all along, but damn it—he had first wanted to win at least one game!

Hauling hard, Kank Thad flattened his victim to the bars so that the astonished watchman was unable to draw his short-sword; and then, so as to make a quick dispatch and offer the greybeard no opportunity to cry out, he dug his fingers in and hauled even harder until skin, flesh, cartilage, windpipe and all parted from the writhing neck of Thasik Haag in a crimson welter of blood and sinew. The watchman hardly knew what had happened, for he was well dead before his murderer let his corpse sink down to the floor to rest. Then Kank Thad set about to make a systematic search of the old man's body.

It was all of an hour later when the captain of the dungeon guard descended the nitre-sweating stone stairway down to that deepest cell. . .there to find the shattered shell of the good and faithful Thasik Haag, and, crouching behind the bars in a corner of his cell in a black and murderous rage of hate and frustration, the great scarfaced Northman. Even with the watchman's shortsword the barbarian had been unable to force an escape. At first sight of this horror-fraught scene the captain's hand went straight to his belt—where dangled the great key Kank Thad had thought to find in Thasik Haag's pockets. . .

HALF THE CITY of Bhur-Esh, it is told, turned out to watch Kank Thad take his departure of this world, gathering in select groups according to status at the feet of the Ghost Cliffs of Shildakor. Thamiel was there, of course, ringed around by a dozen guardsmen with loaded crossbows. He had gained an odd respect for the barbarian since learning of the additional murder of Thasik Haag: the Northman was definitely a berserker and even more dangerous than first believed! But safe in his impregnable circle Thamiel was, as ever, puffed up in the contemplation of the Indefectibility of his Justice.

Kank Thad's thoughts were for once chaotic as his bonds were released and, at half-a-dozen spearpoints, he was forced to mount first the piled bones and stinking shreds of corpses long fallen from the Ghost Cliffs of Shildakor. Noisome and slimy to his sandaled feet were those carrion remains, and given to crumbling and

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pitching him down into their vileness. Nonetheless he made his way for some fifteen feet over this debris of malefactors gone and finally turned with his back to the bare rock face.

"Climb, barbarian," Veth Nuss squeaked from Thamiel's flabby side.

"Climb, O miniscule? And what if I choose simply to sit here on a comfortable skull and drink in this marvelously ripe air?" Kank Thad hated to be ordered to do anything, and especially by one tiny as Veth Nuss. At a sign from Thamiel there came the whistle of cleft air as a bolt buried itself deep in the sandy rock through the Northman's free-hanging hair between his left cheek and shoulder.

"Look a little to your right, savage—and be warned!" Thamiel hissed as the huge murderer threw up an arm in anticipation of further missiles. When he saw that no more bolts were forthcoming, Kank Thad lowered his arm and did as directed, staring along the cliff to his right—and then he swore:

"*Yibb!*" His curse was a mere whisper. At a distance of no more than a few paces a gristly skeleton sat, skewered through the eyesocket to the cliff.

"Aye," Thamiel offered, just loud enough to be heard, "he was one, just like you, who thought not to climb but sit on a skull and drink in the ripeness of the air." His voice changed abruptly: "*Now get on*—My nostrils rot with the stink."

So the climb commenced and at first the going was relatively easy, with plenty of protuberant stones and knobs of rock, gaping fissures and ledges, so that soon Kank Thad was quite high above the breathless crowd gathered there expressly to watch him fall. He did not intend to fall, however, for back home as a youth he had used to climb the sea-cliffs for gull eggs with the best of them; and now, when he'd reached what he thought a sufficient elevation, he paused on a wide ledge and turned to peer down at the multitude of tiny, tiny faces beneath him. The Seeker of Truth in his scarlet turban stood out plainly, with Veth Nuss at his side in the now slowly scattering circle of guards.

"O landwhale," the barbarian called down. "Hey, Thamiel—you, womanbosom!"

"I hear you," Thamiel called back, his voice trembling with rage at the new insults and the disturbing and embarrassing titters of the thronging assembly. "I hear—but will not listen. Go on climbing, or. . ."

"Or what, spherical Lord? I'm already out of range of your weapons. Iron bolts are far too heavy to ever reach me up here."

For the next few minutes Kank Thad sat back on his wide ledge and roared with laughter as bolts clattered against and bounced from the face of the cliff below his position. The closest shot fell short by at least the length of his body. On his ledge, wide enough to walk two horses, a great boulder lay half embedded in the weathered sand. The Northman went to this rock and, out of sight of the crowd below, prised it loose and hoisted it slowly, muscles straining, to his chest. Then he carefully put the boulder down again and stepped back to the ledge's rim.

When Thamiel saw him come back into view he called out: "We'll wait until you either resume climbing or attempt to come down, barbarian. The latter action, I may point out, will only hasten your inevitable death. . ."

Looking down, Kank Thad positioned the "landwhale" in his

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nemory's eye, stepped quickly back and again hoisted the boulder, rushed forward and tossed it from him, barely maintaining his balance as the well aimed projectile sped out and down as truly as a shot from an hurling-engine handled by an Officer of Vilthod's artillery.

Thamiel was quick for one his size, and well he needed to be, flinging himself like a mobile mountain to one side and taking two of his guards with him. Veth Nuss, however, had not been looking, (he was prone enough to attacks of vertigo on the thick Tzulingen carpets of his chambers in the High-Court without peering at the fly-like human way up on the Ghost Cliff walls) and the boulder all but drove him into the earth. He emitted not a single squeak but crumpled like a wafer beneath the boulder and spread out in a scarlet stain on the stony ground. One uncrushed arm and hand protruded from the now shattered boulder's perimeter, and, as irony would have it, the hand was clenched and balanced on the thumb which pointed down. . .

III

FOR A FEW SECONDS there was a silence broken only by Kank Thad's uproarious laughter from on high—and then a multitude of hushed "Oohs" and "Ahhs" of horror went up from the crowd and a scream of rage from Thamiel the Seeker of Truth. A few seconds more and bolts were whizzing, sent more zestfully than before and decidedly, Kank Thad thought, more dangerously.

Earlier, when first he'd paused upon this ledge, the barbarian had seen a runner dispatched in the direction of the palace guard's quarters. He knew that some of Vilthod's guardsmen were longbowmen, and that their flight-arrows might easily end his sojourn in this lofty aerie forever; and so he decided it was time to move on, and there was only one way to go—

When the longbowman arrived at the base of the cliffs a short while later, the barbarian was already out of range and climbing steadily. Nonetheless, at Thamiel's command and strictly to hasten the Northman on his way, an experimental arrow was loosed, fell short, and just missed cutting down a cotter on its return.

In another quarter hour, when Kank Thad next thought to look down, the people were less than ants and the spread city was but a toy. Away to the south lay the Unknown Ocean—placid in the bay like a pond, tossed and wild without—sparkling in the sun and with gulls wheeling about like white midges on the horizon.

Again the barbarian found himself a ledge on which to rest, amusing himself by flinging great boulders from it and picturing in the eye of his imagination the chaos these missiles would create below. They did indeed cause chaos—and death—and soon the crowd, all bar Thamiel and his guards and some few others who were there now to stay, went home. Thamiel was determined to remain til the very end, observing the spiderlike antics of the sentenced man through his powerful glass.

By now Kank Thad was almost half-way to the top, taking his time, making frequent pauses though his muscles were far from tired, systematically checking and observing the cliffs above so that he might always choose the best route. In two shallow niches he had passed crouching skeletons, doubtless remains of bygone climbers who had found themselves too tired

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or frightened to carry on or turn back. There they had starved and died, shivering in fear of their terrible predicament—and perhaps of something else. . .

For a while now, as he climbed, Kank Thad had been pondering the tale told him by Thasik Haag, of Shildakor and the legendary curse he'd brought down on these cliffs following the fall of his son from their heights. A mist had started to weave up from the rock-walled valley below, and the vertical slabs had quickly dampened and turned cold to his touch.

Now oddly enough (or, remembering Shildakor's curse, naturally) this mist went unobserved by Thamiel, still watching through his glass, but it was very real to the Northman and it cut his climbing speed by half. For this was a ghost-mist, raised up by the ancient sorcery of Shildakor, to worry and dismay would-be climbers . . . and Kank Thad was suitably worried and dismayed!

Still, he had carried out observations of the not quite sheer face up to a point some eighty feet or so immediately above him, and mist or none there had seemed plenty of good hand and footholds over that distance. He decided to push on—it would be bad should he find himself stuck here for the night—perhaps the mist would clear as quickly as it had come. But Kank Thad's previous visual reconnaissance proved of little use in the rising banks of fog now surrounding him and cutting down his field of vision to a few scant feet, and soon he found himself for the first time in trouble.

Below, through his glass, Thamiel could see how slow and tortured the barbarian's movements had become, and he chuckled to himself as he watched. Spreadeagled, the big man was, on the awful face, moving upwards inches at a time, and the Seeker of Truth expected to see him fall at any moment. No man—certainly none in Thamiel's time—had ever gone so high before, and the gross, red-turbaned judge did not want to miss this insolent murderer's inevitable slip. One slip was all it would take now.

Yet even as these exceedingly pleasant thoughts were passing through Thamiel's mind, Kank Thad had spotted a reprieve of sorts. Just when it seemed his hand and footholds had run out—when nothing but a flat, smooth surface loomed in front and an abyssal emptiness behind—he saw, just a little to his left, a concavity in the face of the cliff from which long ago a great stone must have fallen. A gentle slide, letting his body fall sideways and to the left, would allow him to put his head and shoulders over the lip of the hole before gravity claimed him completely. Kank Thad looked once at his sandaled feet, to make sure they were firmly seated, pushed himself to the left with his hands; and then, as his motion picked up speed, he saw the—*thing*—that awaited him in the misted darkness of the concavity!

The barbarian's first impulse was to fling himself away, which would of course have proved fatal, but his horror of the thing in the hole froze him rigid—and it saved his life! It was Thasig Haag sat there—legs adangle from the hole, the pipes of his throat hanging out in threads of gristly red and yellow, his good eye bulging and his black tongue lolling—Thasik Haag, or rather his shade. But even as the barbarian's rigid fingers struck the corpse-thing it disappeared, vanishing into mist and leaving the hole empty and once more friendly.

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Kank Thad unfroze in the very last instant of time, his hands shooting forward into the small cave and his shoulders hunching to take the strain as his arms spread wide and wedged. For a second the lower half of his body hung in space, and then he hauled himself up and into the hole.

"Ye Gods!" he whispered to himself, the short hairs of his mane rising on his spine as he thought of the thing he had seen. "Ye Gods—but they named these cliffs aright and no mistake!"

By the time the barbarian was over his initial terror the mist had cleared somewhat and he could see what looked like a good wide ledge some three man-lengths higher. He levered himself from the hole backwards and began to traverse this next section of his climb. It was not easy: projections were slight and toeholds shallow, and for the first time he felt the strain on his powerful muscles. Eventually he was only an arm's length below the ledge, which was when he gave a huge thrust with his legs and threw his arms up and over—*and into a gory mess!*

With one leg cocked on the ledge he reared instinctively back. . .and barely managed to hang by his fingertips as his leg slipped and the full weight of his huge frame fell on his hands. A ghost, of course, he knew that even hanging there—a mess of blood and squashed guts and brain—and an arm, and a clenched hand with the thumb pointing down. . . There had been a flattened grin on the face of the lich, and for an instant Kank Thad had thought to hear a mouse-like squeak of disapproval. Veth Nuss!

Slowly, a monstrous fear clutching his heart, the great Northman pulled himself up and peeped over the lip of the ledge. Nothing! Just a hard shelf of rock with a few pebbles. Wearily the barbarian hauled himself up and lay full-length where the lich of Veth Nuss had stretched in ruptured loathsomeness only a few heartbeats earlier. Now Kank Thad had had two warnings, and he knew what to expect of the rest of his climb.

GHOSTS. . .? Damn them all, for no lifeless ghost could ever harm a man of warm flesh and hot blood! What he must do was simply. . .*ignore* the things, should any more of them appear. If only they wouldn't come at such inopportune moments!

But try as he might the barbarian could not ignore them, and toward the end of his tremendous climb he came across at least a dozen more. Swart Yhemney slavers from the distant East; grisly, bearded Northmen, fathers of buxom daughters lost to Kank Thad's wiles and lusts; taverners who'd called time far too early for a barbarian's thirst, or denied him credit in the first place—many of them. And so there should be, for the scarfaced Northman was an old hand at murder and all of these ghosts had been his victims. . .

Far below, Thamiel's suspense was almost too great to bear. The afternoon was drawing out and his flabby neck ached with the strain of peering upwards through his glass. Even to that instrument the climbing savage was now only a fly, and Thamiel gave a shrill cry of disbelief and frustrated rage as he saw that fly suddenly merge with the high horizon of the Ghost Cliffs of Shildakor. Kank Thad had done it!—the barbarian had climbed the mile-high cliffs!

He had indeed, and his great lungs banged away in his chest and his great muscles throbbed and ached as he rested his elbows atop the night-

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mare abyss. His eyes swam and the sweat stood hot on his forehead; but not for long, for here a cool wind constantly blew from the east, blowing sand and grit in his eyes and bringing a final curtain of fog from the unseen valleys and unknown places beyond.

"I, Kank Thad, have done it!" the savage roared to the world. "What no man ever did before, that I—" he opened and closed his mouth, hanging on his elbows, peering into the mist. Then he shook his head and with a worried grin recommenced his broken cries of victory and self-esteem. "That I have—"

His boasting finally gurgled into a choked silence and the wind keened into his bared teeth. . .

Eyes bugging the barbarian saw the horror lurch from out the mist, saw the thing that had been a man crumple to its knees while still advancing, saw it reach out for him with jerking, crooked fingers and heard the agonized, rasping rattle of its throat. Clad in a bronze and leather breastplate, in thonged sandals and a leaden kirtle it came—and its green features were twisted in eternal agony and its eyes blazed with the red light of revenge.

"*Yibb!*" the barbarian croaked, and then: "Get you gone, Theen of Vilthod's Guard! I know you, lich—and you're impotent to harm me in death even as you were in life. Aye, and for that matter impotent of all else!"

Yet still came the shade on, shuffling on its knees before the Northman who fell back until once again he was hanging by his fingertips only. Blood flowed freely from between the horror's thighs, ghost-blood that yet splashed Kank Thad's face and ran scarlet down his straining arms, lich-blood that yet wetted the smooth rock of the cliff and made it slippery to the barbarian's fingers. In his mind's eye the terrified Northman saw himself once more in the tavern of Hethica Nid, and for the first time he recognized the monstrousness of the drunken atrocity he had perpetrated there. More freely yet ran the blood from the apparition's violated loins, wetter the rocks and slimier still.

"Oh, Gutrip!" the barbarian moaned once. "Why did you let me use you so?"—with which his fingers slipped in the blood and his great back arched in a death-embracing rigor and his eyes closed to shut out forever that ancient world.

And his body fell with the speed of one of those stars that slide down the heavens at night. . .

A mile below Thamiel broke into a little dance and chortled and slapped his fat thighs, flinging his glass away in his complete exuberance and finally giggling hysterically. It had looked like the barbarian had won, and then, for no reason apparent in his glass, the great savage had fallen. Oh, how he laughed and stamped his feet.

Then, remembering his Imperishable and Immaculate Justice, he puffed himself up, set his scarlet turban a trifle more correctly upon his head—and quickly got out of the way.

And a few seconds later Kank Thad returned to Bhur-Esh.

—BRIAN LUMLEY

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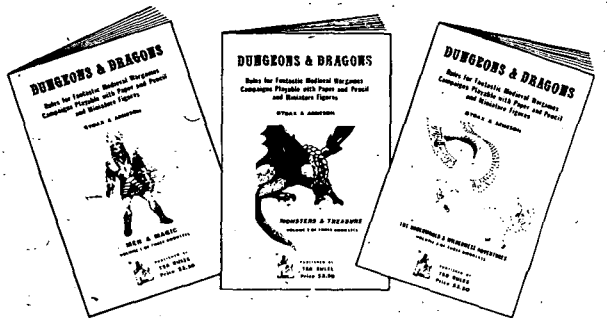

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THE MAN WHO MARRIED A BEAGLE

BARRY N. MALZBERG

Illustrated by Dan Steffan

I

We were civilized people and tried to keep the divorce as amicable as possible but after a while bitterness extruded. It could have been no other way. There is no such thing as a friendly divorce. I had from the start made it clear that Susan could have custody, the house and one half of all joint property but I was insistent upon the silverware and the convertible. She gave ground on the convertible but her position on the silverware was absolute. "We need it," she said, "and besides it meant nothing to you. You never even noticed whether we were using plain forks or the specials. I spent hours polishing it. Almost all of my life I now see has been tied up in possessions, I won't give up this one. Etc." At a certain point the discussion broke down, took an ugly turn. After everything I had done to avoid ugliness I came to understand that in certain essential ways it would be part of our separation. Nevertheless I remained courteous. I suggested that we talk about it at some later date when we were both calmer. I left the house. Two days later I was informed that Susan had changed attorneys and had considerably upped her demands. She was going to be punitive after all. I instructed my own attorney to stand fast. I had my phone changed and delisted. For several weeks thereafter Susan and I had no contact but when one of the boys became ill and asked for me she reached me through my attorney. I went over, of course. I retained throughout—retain to this day—the strongest ties to my family. In the sickroom I found her quite calm and reasonable.

II

Lady and I took a small furnished apartment on West 83rd Street in Manhattan. It had been my original intention to stay out of New York, perhaps even find quarters in another section of the suburb in which Susan and I had lived but my attorney was very much against this and I could see his point. Throughout I had concealed our relationship from Susan; it was important to me that no indication be given of the real reasons for the divorce. The last gift I wanted to give her was that no one had intervened; our relationship, a thing of in-

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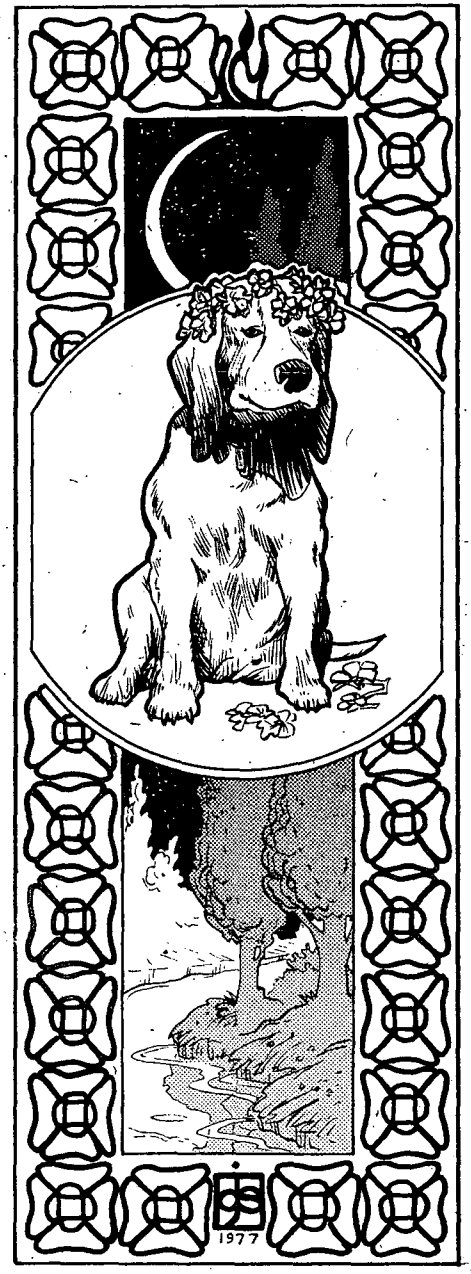
tegrity, had broken down entirely on its own terms. Living in the community would have opened up the possibility of scandal. Also my attorney and friends warned about the possibility of embarassing confrontations. We might meet in Wonder Waffles or then again at the Shlomo Meat Mart which we both continued to patronize. Better, at least, until the separation agreement was signed, to restrict my contact to visitation.

I had never liked Manhattan even when I lived there as a bachelor many years ago but returning under these circumstances did not prove unpleasant. Lady brought magic to our three small rooms as she had to all of the places which we had inhabited together before. To live in feeling, I know now, is the only gift. Walking her toward dusk amidst the rubbish and beer cans of the west side, pausing by the schoolyard gate while she sniffed and pawed crumpled pieces of paper, going out alone late at night to pick up some cigarettes and tomorrow's *Daily News* I felt again like a very young man, the man who had lived alone in New York in his twenties, the city resonant, the sense of connection so close that it seemed palpable, the Jersey Palisades which I could glimpse dimly through the fumes of the dying borough exerting upon me a sense of mystery so vast that it came close to joy, touched pain. Later in bed I would read *The Daily News* one hand on Lady's haunches, feeling the slow and convoluted movement of her blood; only for me, only for me.



III

AT LENGTH an agreement was reached through the attorneys: we would split the silverware. Not without irony I specified that Susan could

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have the cutting implements. On the afternoon I went to pick it up I found her strained, beaten, the harder lines of her face broken by exhaustion to reveal to me the young girl who I had loved at a different stage of life, in another Manhattan. She had it all boxed for me, an exquisitely thoughtful touch not uncharacteristic of the woman. She was always thoughtful. She always did the proper thing. She never did anything which in any way could have been construed as wrongful. She was nice. She was a nice person. At one time I thought that this was the core of the problem—that she gave me no objective basis for my feelings of emptiness—but later, even before the separation, I came to see that this was not so. We make our own lives. Always, eternally, we live within ourselves. She wanted to talk. "Are you happy?" she said, "I worry about you."

"Yes," I said, "I'm happy. Or at least happier."

"I think about you living in Manhattan. It's such an ugly city. Do you see lots of people? Are you going out with women again? What do you do in the evenings?"

"Work," I said, "I'm working twelve hours a day." Not a breath of scandal would I bring to the divorce. How things will go after the eighteen month formal separation and my remarriage I cannot say but until then I will protect her as much as possible from pain. "When I come home I pick up tomorrow's *Daily News* and drink beer and read it. Weekends I rent a car and go for long drives alone and sometimes I do nothing at all."

"I don't hate you," she said. "It would be so much easier if I could, you know. But I have none of that now. Maybe at the beginning but now, most of the time, I find that I can think of you without anger. The boys miss you, you know. They still don't understand and I can't explain it to them."

"Someday they will," I said. "I'll talk to them a little about it. I think that they do understand." Once in Burger King I explained that their mother and I did not love each other any more or at least we loved each other in a different way but we would both always love them but their faces became so distracted and my own voice sounded so plaintive and dull that I dropped the subject fearing that I was becoming every male character in every story and film about divorce with children that I had ever been exposed to. "The important thing is that we will always have each other anyway," I had finished and, gesturing, had upset half a cup of Coke and an unfinished carton of french fries over my lap. When I stood the stain felt like a stain of implication. "I don't hate you either, Susan," I said. "I feel very deeply for you. Part of this comes out of love, you know. You're entitled to live with someone with whom you can have the whole range of feeling." *Like me*, I thought but did not add.

"You're a liar," she said. "You're not doing it out of love. Nothing in this place was ever done out of love by anyone for anyone." She stood, straightened the planes of her clothing. "Take your silverware and get out of here."

"I don't want to hurt you. I never meant to hurt you."

"You never meant to hurt anyone. You just spread joy where you sit. You're a really wonderful person."

"I don't want you to be bitter, Susan. I'm not bitter."

"I'm not bitter either," she said. "We had a happy marriage and we're

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having a wonderful divorce. I'm going away all next week. The boys will be with my parents if you want to see them but I'm sure you'll be relieved to know that you're not expected."

"Are you going away with anyone?"

"That's none of your business."

"I wouldn't mind if you were. I want you to be happy. I want your happiness and always did. It won't affect the separation agreement or anything of that nature."

"You're really a monster," she said. "Do you know that? I was packing the silverware two hours ago and even crying a little bit but now that I see you and listen to this I know what a fool I've been. There will be no more crying. You are truly a monstrous person."

"You don't understand," I said. "You don't understand what this has done to me."

"You talk of feeling. You have no feeling. Get out of here now or I'll throw something at you."

I could see that the situation was on the verge of moving into an ugliness that I thought we had passed. "All right," I said, lifting the box and going to the door. "All right then. Someday perhaps you will understand." I stood wavering before the door, trying to balance the heavy box with one arm while with the other reaching for the knob but I could not reach the balance and merely stood there helplessly until I could see that Susan was not going to help me either. Grunting I put down the box, opened the door, held it open with a foot, hefted the box, stumbled into the thin suburban dusk carrying my goods as if they were guilt.

Stumbling down the path toward the convertible, the path which I had walked ten thousand times to the metronome of my life I waited for her to say something but she said nothing nor did she close the door. When I came to the car, put the box in back, turned to go to the driver's side I could see her there, standing, looking at me and in a way her posture was as it had been many years ago, on our second date as she had waited for me at the top of her stairs. It came back to me shockingly, every detail fluorescent but of course it could not change the situation. I drove away.

My lawyer had warned me that even the coldest of divorces would be emotionally devastating. He had suggested, perhaps, an analyst. I had refused him—my relationship with Lady supersedes outside transactions of any sort—but now, finally, I accepted his warning. The pain, the pain! And I had thought myself to be the strongest person I knew.

IV

I KNEW from the first moment I saw her that it would be serious but I could not judge the extent of the involvement nor the panic as I realized, early in our relationship, that I had already reached a point of no return. Being with her in the cubicle I rented by the week under a false name in the SRO hotel on 97th Street opened me up almost immediately to what I understood aging and aging in the suburbs had done to me and perhaps all of us: we had lived in the death of feeling. Feeling had been taken away from us piece by piece in such infinitesimal bites that for most of us we might never know the difference: there are an infinite number of devices to conceal that awareness. PTA, the car pool, the Temple membership, the art auction and the Sunday summer parties; during the week a little casual adultery only to preserve the illusion of choice. But it was not

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only passion which we had lost, it was ourselves and being with Lady, moving in the small and enclosed spaces which she gave to me so freely, so openly I made that confrontation of self and from that point onward knew that I could go no further. I could not live in feeling for ten hours a week; live in death for the other one hundred and fifty eight, I knew that I would have to make the choice and it was no choice. I thought that I had loved Susan but that was only in the negligible space which the death of feeling had left me; it was Lady who showed me and beyond denial what love could be.

It could not go on that way. I knew that it could not go on that way. I left with her in the room dishes of all kinds, small snacks, testimonies of my love, liquids of various flavors, little notes, confessions, my clothing, small evidences and secrets of my being which I hoped she might sniff out in the hours or days (my work was unpredictable) of our separation and yet it was not enough, there was nothing that I could leave with her or take away from that room which would reduce the anguish of the separation. To be away from her, every separation, was to live in the death of the heart; to be with her once more was to have rekindled only for those agonizing instants what I had so long thought dead that I had not even know that I missed it.

I tried. That must be said; I tried. I am a sensible man; I had lived in commitment to that quality of sense for many years. I treasured the prerogatives of my life; living between those clean, cold instruments of my eternity I had given myself what I had been taught to believe in as a careful pleasure and even brought to the absolute instants of self-realization I still tried to exercise a kind of control. I am a controlled man; I believe in decorousness as my ancestors might have been said to have believed in the coming of the Messiah . . . . as an abstraction, if nothing else, by which to live. A careful affair, carefully structured, that was my intention and an affair was more to my advantage than it might have been to other men because Lady truly had no life of her own: her only life was that with me. I could keep her in the SRO cubicle, I did not have to worry about her being involved with some stud down the street or making time at a kennel, leaving her odors against lampposts for crazed collies to track: no, she was all mine and in the containment of the room it was possible for me to believe that it would continue that way.

But it could not be done. The integrity of my love, if nothing else, would not permit me to do this. It was not only knowing of her abandonment, her loneliness in the spaces of the rooms, her single yearning for me which must have consumed her just as did my own sense of loss. It was not only the realization that my marriage and my life had been a lie, that in the denial of feeling I had hid from myself the apprehension of my truest self; it was not even that (although this was an important factor) the very act of copulation with Susan, giving her those small and necessary words of love which always accompanied the act made me feel as if I was betraying her on the deepest level. No, simply and ultimately I did what I must because if I hadn't it would have denied, would have made a deception of the truest and deepest part of myself which, at last, had been uncovered. And so I did what I felt I

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must but always in the way which would bring the least amount of pain.

"It wasn't your fault," I said to Lady and I felt she understood, whimpering, turning toward me, "whatever happens, whatever comes of this you must understand, must always understand that you bear no responsibility. You bear no blame. It all came from inside me, it was my decision alone and I know that you would never have forced me to do this. Do you see that?" I said, "do you see it?" and in the lustrous stare of her eyes, in the slow movement of her tail, in the new softnesses that I uncovered in touch of her ears I knew that she did and to that degree, to the level that I knew she accepted this I found for the first time my own tenuous passage toward sanctification.

V

Custody and the house were given to Susan along with an alimony-and-support payment of twelve hundred dollars a month, tied to my current gross earnings. The terms were very harsh and my own circumstances perilous but still I did not contest. It was important to do the right thing for Susan and the boys; it was important that all of the pain which could be minimized be so. After the settlement I would be left with an income of some ten thousand dollars yearly for myself and Lady, barely manageable for one who had been accustomed to a dignified standard of living and painful knowledge that at the age of forty-one I would be starting where I had twenty years ago with the added pain of financial obligation and terrible guilt. Still, I did not protest. Harsh as the terms were, I knew in my heart that I deserved terms even harsher. I should never have married Susan; I should not have lived with her in a lie for so many years. She might have had other opportunities. She might, at the age of forty have other opportunities yet although I could not be optimistic about her marriageability and in no circumstances looked upon that *deus ex machina* to free me.

Not having custody (although I would not admit this to the lawyers, let alone Susan) was a relief. What would I have done with them in the first place? It is all that I can do to keep an amused, interested, suburban exterior when we are at Wonder Waffles. Too, children should remain with their mother, in settled circumstances; it would be terribly unfair, everyone knows, to uproot those who are not compelled to be uprooted. Then too, if I had had the boys it would have been difficult to have enjoyed my relationship with Lady to the fullest; sooner or later, if I wished to be honest—and I had resolved never to be dishonest again—startling admissions would have to have been made which would have been very difficult for all of us.

VI

Sometimes I wondered if any other man had been in circumstances exactly like mine and at other times I felt that it was of no consequence whatsoever. Only feeling is real; only the statement of the heart. I had learned that. Still, walking Lady on leash—late at night I would occasionally look at other men and women walking their dogs and wonder idly: was it this way for them too? Was I in another kind of suburb: the West Side a resting place for less surburban passions? I did know nor would I have ever asked, I believe in the integrity now of the human spirit but now and again I would find myself ex-

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changing glances with some of the others, scottish terriers or Weimaraners walking proudly at leash beside them, and think: who knows? Who knows all of the contortions of the heart, the positions into which we may become entangled? Certainly anyone from the Moon looking at Susan and I entangled in our bedroom at midnight would have regarded it as at least as strange as the behavior of we walkers and our dogs, quiet and absorbed with one another on the rubble-strewn streets of bombed-out Manhattan in the late darkness.

VII

It was my decision to get married as soon as the formal eighteen-month separation period had expired and the final papers were signed. There was no need for the contract and yet I felt that this was its beauty: that voluntarily I was making a deep commitment only because I felt within myself that the commitment was deserved. Since it is unlikely that Lady and I could be married within any of the established religions I found a female minister given credentials by one of the small California mail-order sects who agreed to marry us in any place we desired at a minimal fee. She stated that she would be responsible, if I liked, for bringing witnesses. Her entire attitude was so matter of fact, her acceptance of the situation so total that I understood once again what self-deceit had been mine in the suburbs; I had sealed off from myself ninety percent or more of the range of human possibility or feeling as if to have it were contemptible . . . only to find that what was the more contemptible was the private and unspeakable death of the heart, over and again in all of the open and closed spaces of that county.

VIII

On the day that the agreement became final Susan and I went for a drink in the cocktail lounge of Mister Bear. The boys were with a sitter and Susan said that it would have to be a short meeting; she had a date later that evening, nothing serious but someone she could not stand up. This admission, made in all shyness, opened me up, began for the first time to pry at that layer of guilt which I had had since the evening I left the house. She is finding a life of her own; she cares enough to tell me this, I thought. Looking at her in the warmth of the candles I found myself reconstructing bit by bit her face as it had been so many years ago when we had first gone to cocktail lounges and in this too there was no pain, but only the realization that although we travel incessantly and without return, we also carry baggage as recollection. "I guess I don't hate you any more," Susan said finally. "I don't know if I like you very much but at least I don't hate you. This must have been very hard for you also."

"It was. Harder than you can imagine. But I felt that it was best for both of us."

"No," she said, "you felt that it was better for you and I was merely carried along, whatever the price, whatever the consequences. If it had been death for me it wouldn't have stopped you." She finished her drink. "But I will say that it worked out for the best. In certain ways. In other ways of course it didn't."

"I'm glad for the good parts and sad for the poor ones, Susan."

"A lot of what you said makes sense," she said. "That business about the death of feeling in the suburban middle class: I didn't understand for a long time but now I'm beginning to

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see what you mean and even that it had happened to us."

"We didn't want it that way. It just happened."

"That's what I mean," she said, "that's exactly what I mean. It wasn't something that happened between us, it was something that happened *to* us, that was all. That was the terror." She stood, took her coat. "I'm glad we had this chance to talk," she said. "You were right. You were right all along, I didn't see the point in it but in a way it's as formal as a marriage, our last drink together before divorce."

"Yes," I said, looking at her almost in feeling. "That was what I thought."

"Are you happier now?"

"Yes."

"Have you found someone to love?"

I pause, shake my head, sigh, then say, "Yes, I think so. I think so now. Have you?"

"No," she said, "not yet. But I'm glad. I'm glad for you. If it didn't kill the capacity for feeling in you then perhaps it hasn't in me as well. Someday. Someday I will."

"I very much hope so," I said and took her arm, gently, fondling the almost imperceptible bone where her joints fused. "I think you will." I went to the bar, paid the check; we walked out of Mister Bear's very much like lovers pausing for hasty, necessary meeting on the turnpike before proceeding in opposite ways toward their destiny; her kiss to mine was light and gentle and at the center of it I could sense although not really feel those darker fires which, in all of her heart and all of her courtesy, nice person that she always was, she had been unable to give me.

IX

LADY and I were married by the religious cult lady in the living room of the SRO rooms we had occupied. She brought two witnesses, bearded men who looked at us with admiration. I paid them all well and when they were gone showed Lady the lease I had just signed on a new unfurnished apartment in the West Seventies, a brownstone basement apartment with separate entrance. She squirmed against me and then her eyes turned moist.

X

WE OCCUPIED the brownstone and lived in love. On alternate Tuesdays and Saturdays I took the boys to Wonder Waffles, Mister Bear, the Cocoanut King and various amusement parks within the area. Once I brought along Lady to romp with them. Susan began to date a divorced dentist regularly.

XI

IN APRIL of another year I awoke, Lady beside me, and looked at her and knew (although I would not be able to verbalize this for many months thereafter) that the feeling was going and that my search, consequentially, must begin again. Life is not an ending; life is a process, I later came to understand and it was exactly at that moment and in a way ten times worse than the first that the pain began again.

—BARRY N. MALZBERG

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MIRACLE ELIXIR

PHILIP LATHAM

Philip Latham is the well-known pseudonym of astronomer Robert S. Richardson, who tells us an unusual story about a world identical to ours in all respects but one. . .

Illustrated by JOE STATON

DEVONS' eyes gleamed through his rimless glasses.

"Well, Moffat, what's the trouble this time?" he said, after a slow five seconds.

Charles ("Chuck" to his few close friends) Moffat shifted uneasily.

"I'd like to make a request, sir."

Devons' frown was almost mechanical. He laid the letter he had just signed on the precise upper right-hand corner of his otherwise bare desk top. Mr. Devons for ten years had been Dean of a private boys' school, before accepting his present position of manager of the Pearce Golden Specific company. Everyone in the office, with the exception of Mr. Lee Henderson, the president, received the same treatment. Young or old, male or female, was still a small boy requiring counseling or discipline.

"May I inquire the nature of this request?"

"I have an appointment with my doctor early this afternoon. As you know, doctors are usually late meeting appointments."

Mr. Devons nodded.

"Yes, unreliable—doctors. Very well, Moffat, take whatever time you need."

"Thank you, Mr. Devons."

"Nothing serious, I trust?"

"Oh, I'm sure it isn't. It's just that I seem to lack the energy I need. Have to keep forcing myself to make the day. This morning I discovered that Margaret—Mrs. Moffat—had already made an appointment for me."

"Very sensible decision." Mr. Devons began polishing his already stainless glasses. "I've been reluctant to mention it, Moffat, but recently I fear you have been slipping a bit. Your report for the fiscal year contained several flaws. Not errors, you understand, but statements open to misinterpretation."

"The pressure's been building up. Now that two of the girls left."

"I know. Felt it myself. Which means we must redouble our efforts. And quick. Our competitors are forging ahead."

He indicated a chart on the wall traced with one pink and several green lines. Pink was the PGS line. The others those of their competitors.

"You'll notice that Wonder Worker and Miracle Maker, our chief competitors, are on the rise. Whereas PGS is falling steadily. Confound it, you'd

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think people didn't need painkillers or laxatives anymore."

"Oh, I'm sure they do, sir."

"Worst drop has been in Aunt Bella's Beneficent Balsam. Twelve per cent below both Miracle Maker and Wonder Worker."

The two contemplated this sag in Aunt Bella as if it had been a breakthrough in the frontline defense.

"Er. . .perhaps Aunt Bella needs a new image," Moffat ventured.

Mr. Devons perceptibly stiffened.

"What do you mean, a new image?"

"Well, Miracle Mist has got a girl on their cover that's practically a straight steal from Botticelli's Venus on the half-shell. Wonder Worker has got a bunch of Wood Nymphs. But Aunt Bella is still the same wholesome farm wife. And our slogan 'Good for Man or Beast' was all right in the last century—"

"May I remind you that Aunt Bella's Balsam has been a boon to women's backbones and horses' hind legs since well-nigh the Civil War? And we're staying with her."

"It was only a suggestion, sir."

Mr. Devons smiled faintly. "I recommend that you should indeed see a doctor."

Moffat returned to his desk thoroughly aware of the scrutiny of the score of girls in the room. Actually not a single one could rigorously qualify as a girl. All were past forty and some were pushing fifty. Yet they persisted in referring to themselves as "girls." Like the characters in the comic section, they were ageless, fixtures in time. Several times Moffat had made sarcastic references to this anachronism. Chuck Moffat was not popular with the office staff.

Miss Clemence had materialized beside his desk. Owing to her seniority in service, her authority extended

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to other important areas beyond her clerical duties. She rang the bell for the end of the coffeebreak, and was likely to drop a hint to girls who tended to prolonged stays in the rest room.

"We haven't received the sales report from our Wichita office, Mr. Moffat."

"That's probably because they haven't sent it in yet."

"What's the matter?"

"Can't seem to stir them up."

"Have you tried?"

"Wrote them last August."

"Have you tried again?"

"No."

"I don't know what Mr. Henderson will think."

Chuck took a long breath. "Does anyone ever know what Mr. Henderson thinks?"

Long ago he had discovered the baffling properties of the rhetorical question. It was somewhat the same as in boxing, when you landed a punch and then tied up your opponent in a quick clinch. You scored a point and left your man unable to retaliate. Boxing was Moffat's only distinguishing feature over other middle-aged office workers.

You see Moffats everywhere. Pouring out of office buildings at noon; waiting for the stoplight to change from red to green; tuning in their radio on the weather and Dow Jones report. They wear drab ties to match their drab suits. They are medium height, a little over-weight, clean shaven, with undistinguished features. It was Chuck's features that set him apart from other minor executives: the scar over one eye and slightly flattened nose.

Moffat hated arguments and altercations. But as a youngster he had had to learn to fight to keep from getting beaten up on his way to Sunday school. To his own surprise and that of others he had turned out to have some natural ability with his fists. In college he had tried out for boxing but failed to make the team. But he had learned some things which became automatic afterwhile: maneuvering around the ring, jabbing, ducking, and feinting.

After college he had tried to keep in condition by working out in the garage on a laundry bag stuffed with 25 pounds of newspaper. He considered it better than a speed bag or the heavy bag, since it jerked and twisted more like a real boxer. He always worked out strictly alone. Often he felt that laundry bag was the only reality left in the world that was wholly his own. Gradually the pressure of work and worry had made his sessions in the garage less frequent. Yet he still liked to see the bag dangling there. Its worn lumpy surface reminded him of his own eroded career.

WHEN Chuck had said, "Does anyone ever know what Mr. Henderson thinks?", he had simply voiced what everyone at PGS already knew. Your real man of mystery is not a monster with buck teeth in a Gothic mansion. They live in a Mediterrean villa, bright with flowers, and a view of the ocean. They proceed quietly about the drudgery of their business, patient, unobtrusive, and detached.

No hint of scandal had ever touched Mr. Henderson. He seemed quite satisfied with his lonely existence, save for an occasional round of golf at the country club and a chat with old friends. Some of the girls when they were really girls had tried hard for a break-through. They had gotten an absent nod and a pleasant smile—yes. But intimacy—no. Even-

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tually they had decided he was hopelessly celibate and had given up. Then unexpectedly, to their utter consternation, he had casually announced his marriage to a woman outside the office, wholly unknown, a few years older than himself. It was infuriating.

AFTER GETTING RID of Miss Clemence, Chuck pulled on his coat and shuffled over to a small park across the street. He sat down on a bench, damp from the cold gray drizzle. PGS occupied a four story brick building in the low rent district, several blocks west of Wilshire Boulevard. Once it had been an affluent area, with smart dress shops and status brokerage firms. But long ago rezoning had done its deadly work. Now it was lined with pornographic book shops, dingy cigar and pool halls, and dejected eating places.

The sole bright spot was a huge Pearce's billboard, emblazoned with an orange sun dispelling the morning clouds, revealing a landscape studded with birds, flowers, and fruit trees. It bore a single sentence in golden letters, "VIGOROL—TOWARD A BRIGHTER TOMORROW." Best feature about the sign was that it told nothing but promised much.

It had never occurred to Moffat to take Vigorol for his depression and lassitude. Actually he didn't know much about the stuff. It consisted mostly of brownish water, half the vitamins in the alphabet and all the minerals except the rare earths and radioactive group.

Promptly at two o'clock he took the express elevator to the twentieth floor of Dr. Einasto's office. Its speed sent his empty stomach quivering. The thought of food disgusted him.

After browsing through the *National Geographic* and *Hygeia*, he was ushered to a cell covered by a white curtain and told to strip to his shorts and socks. Dr. Einasto would see him in just a moment. Then another twenty minutes wait. Finally the curtain was drawn aside and the great man suddenly appeared.

Dr. Einasto looked exactly as a distinguished physician should look: overweight, bald, and a Van Dyke beard. He was an internist, meaning a physician who specialised in medicine and diagnosis. He never operated or delivered babies.

He shook hands and greeted Chuck with a genial smile.

"Well, Mr. Moffat, what seems to be the trouble?"

His accent was slightly foreign which probably appealed to women.

Moffat shook his head apologetically. Nothing real bad. No definite symptoms. Just always tired, depressed, and generally run down. Also impotent, he added after a pause.

Dr. Einasto sighed.

"Hardest kind of case to diagnose, Mr. Moffat. If you get an ailment, Mr. Moffat, always pick one with nice clear-cut symptoms. Well. . . sit down on the table and let me look you over."

After thumping and listening to his patient front and back, he removed his stethescope and sat gloomily gazing at him for a full minute.

"I sometimes wonder if we overcomplicate a case. We make elaborate and expensive tests. We search for obscure symptoms. When all the time no symptoms exist." He sighed. "How about a vacation and change of scene?"

Moffat shook his head. "Impossible."

Dr. Einasto began slowly pacing

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back and forth across the little room, his head sunk on his chest. He stopped and turned abruptly.

"How would you like to be my white rat, Mr. Moffat?"

"White rat?"

"Rats much better lab animals than guinea pigs. Breed faster. Eat same wretched food as humans. Guinea pigs strict vegetarians."

He opened a cabinet from which he extracted a quart bottle of some colorless fluid.

"Just received this bottle from a European colleague. Good man. Very enthusiastic. This pharmaceutical only one in country." He studied Moffat intently. "Might help. You afraid to try?"

"I'll try anything."

"Good!" He passed the bottle to Moffat. Moffat handled it with care almost amounting to reverence. He examined the label which was wholly unintelligible. Probably Dutch.

"I wish you try this medicine for one week. Then let me know results. But only under strict condition."

"Yes?"

"That you follow directions exactly. Any hardship?"

"Minimal."

"Take two teaspoonfuls in equal amount of water, before meals and bedtime. Never exceed dosage."

Chuck wrote it down on a slip of paper.

"Since this purely experimental I make no charge. Best part of treatment."

"Thanks."

The doctor poured 2 c.c. of the colorless fluid into a flask and added an equal quantity of water.

"Now. . .drink this. *Viel Glück!*"

Moffat gulped it down. God! Immediately he went into a spasm of choking and coughing. It was like a stream of liquid fire. A live coal in his gullet. The spasms subsided. Gradually the heat from the fiery coal gave way to a sensation of pleasant warmth stealing through his body.

The doctor had never taken his eyes off him.

"You feeling better?"

"Yeah. Yeah. Perfectly all right."

Dr. Einasto rose.

"I have other patient waiting. I see you again in few minutes. Lie back. Be very still. . .quiet."

Moffat stretched back as directed. But he soon became restless. For the first time in months he craved activity. His mind was racing. His ideas confused yet curiously clear and logical. Maybe some more of the medicine. . . .

Quickly he sat up, sloshed some medicine and water in the beaker. This time, knowing what to expect, he drank it more slowly. Oh, what wonderful stuff! Where were his depression and woes of the morning?

A pretty young nurse swept into the room. She had black hair and eyes and a white shirt a foot above her knees. She was not just plain pretty but sexy pretty. Chuck sat up on the edge of the couch.

"Hi, honey. You come to see me?"

She frowned. "I'm looking for Dr. Einasto's prescription pad."

It occurred to Chuck that it was a long, long time since he had been alone practically naked with a girl like this one. He was also aware of a long sought effect transpiring under his shorts. Success! Success at last! It was kind of embarrassing. Well, what the hell? Nurses were different. Why, a nurse must know more about the male sex organs than the male sex organs themselves.

"Maybe in the lab. . . ."

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She was hurrying out when she shot a quick glance at Chuck.

"Feeling all right?"

"Swell."

She came over and reached for his pulse. "Hmmmm. . .rather fast."

"Just since you came in."

But she was already back at the curtain.

"You lie down," she said curtly. Then with a quick smile. "And get that erection under control."

"Can't, dammit!"

"Concentrate on something. Think of your wife peeling potatoes."

"She's got a patent potato peeler."

"Well, there must be *something*. Your job. . .football."

He tried to follow her but she was already through the curtain. That was his fate, always to be rejected. He took another quick sip from the bottle, lay back on the couch, and closed his eyes.

Dr. Einasto entered.

"Well, how's the patient?"

Chuck smiled faintly. "Very well."

"No nausea. . .vertigo. . .disorientation?"

"No."

"Any particular exhilaration . . .libido?"

"No."

The doctor took the bottle, examined it with a slightly puzzled expression, and wrapped it in heavy paper.

"All right, now you get in your clothes. Take this bottle with you. Remember—don't exceed dosage."

Chuck nodded solemnly.

"I shall follow your instructions with the utmost care."

"Wish all my patients so cooperative." He gave Chuck a hearty slap on the back that almost sent him headlong through the curtain. "Make appointment this time next week."

THE ELEVATOR descended with such rapidity that for a moment Chuck thought part of him was coming up instead of staying down. But once outdoors the fresh air and rain on his face and head revived him wonderfully. After a few blocks he was practically normal. His thoughts kept returning to the nurse in the miniskirt. He was overwhelmed with remorse. He loved Margaret. Never in their twenty years of marriage had he been unfaithful.

He was approaching a small florist shop where he had occasionally bought flowers. Why not buy Margaret some flowers now? You didn't have to wait for a birthday or anniversary. He would get her something real special with a love note buried in the blossoms.

Only one thing caused him to hesitate: several times he had suspected the proprietor of holding out on him. But owing to his hatred of argument he had always been afraid to protest. This time it would be different. To make sure it would be different he stepped in a doorway and took a gulp from the bottle.

He strode into the shop and inquired the price of the roses in the glass case.

"This time of year roses very rare. . .very expensive," the proprietor said. "But for you I make a special price. Red roses fifteen dollars the dozen. White roses twelve dollars."

"Give me ten red roses and two white roses."

"Yes, sir, the very best."

While the florist was arranging the roses in a long green box, Chuck wrote on a card,

"The red rose whispers of passion,

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The white rose breathes of love."

He had forgotten the rest or who wrote it, but that should be enough.*

"That will be $15.37 with the tax."

Chuck gave him a twenty. The florist laid $3.25 on the counter. One of the few things on which Chuck flattered himself was his ability at mental arithmetic. Even in his present disordered state of mind it stayed with him.

"You've short-changed me."

The proprietor hastily counted the money. "I never short-change anyone in my life."

"You've short-changed me $1.38. And, dammit, it's not the first time."

Chuck was over-flowing with energy. He punded on the counter, knocking over a flower pot, sending mud and water over his clothes.

"That's three dollars you owe me for the flower pot."

"Try and get it, you lying bastard."

"Nobody calls me those names."

The proprietor came around from behind the counter. He was not as tall as Chuck but stocky and muscular.

"No? Ever get a right fist straight in the nose?"

Chuck approached the proprietor menacingly, made a feint at his nose. Then suddenly crossed with his left, which he had purposely been holding low. It caught the man square on the jaw, sending him reeling. A woman came running from the back room waving a pair of scissors.

Chuck decided it was a good idea to quit while he was still ahead. He grabbed the green box and dashed out the door.

He was never quite clear how he found his way home. But somehow he found himself in his front room, grasping for breath, and dizzy. Margaret came out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. Charles thrust the box of roses in her arms and collapsed on the sofa.

"Charles, what in heaven's name?" Margaret bent over him. "Your shirt's filthy, and your breath is awful."

(The Moffats never called each other "Chuck" or "Maggie." It was always Charles and Margaret).

"Awful all over."

He hoisted himself off the sofa and steered an uncertain course toward the stairs.

"Charles, where are you going?"

"Going to bed," he announced.

"But dinner is almost ready. I've got macaroni and cheese and onions."

Charles clutched at the bannister. "Still going to bed."

He reached his room, hastily closed and locked the door. Then he concealed the bottle of medicine behind volumes XXI and XXII of the *Library of the World's Best Literature*. It was the first time he had found a use for the *Library of the World's Best Literature*. They were wide heavy books a foot long, ideal for concealing quart bottles.

Then he began shedding his clothes, letting them drop wherever they hit the floor. You couldn't miss the floor.

After which he fell into bed and was asleep in an instant.

HE WOKE to gray light filtering through the windows and rain dripping from the roof. Was it still the same evening or the next morning? By a masterful effort he rolled his head toward the clock. Eleven-ten. Must be next morning. He lay for several minutes trying to put together

*John Boyle O'Reilly (1844-1890). Besides his sentimental verse, O'Reilly also wrote a book on pugilism.

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the events of the previous day.

Margaret tip-toed in the room. First her gaze fell on her husband's blank face on the pillow. Then she went about the more important task of picking up his clothes.

Finally she came over to the bed. "Feeling better, dear?"

Charles took inventory.

"I guess I'll survive. Stomach's the worst."

"How would you like some nice hot onion soup?"

"Okay." Anything to change that ghastly gnawing in his interior.

Margaret returned in a few minutes with a tray bearing a steaming bowl of soup, crackers, salt and pepper, and a spoon and napkin.

"Now I'll be down in the kitchen," she told him. "Call me if you want any more."

The soup was all right. The main trouble was getting his trembling hand to convey it from the bowl to his mouth. Suddenly he made a bolt for the bathroom, returning wan and shaken. Perhaps some more of the medicine would help. It had helped yesterday in his various crises.

He groped behind volumes XXI and XXII and was somewhat surprised to find the bottle still there. In the strange world in which he had been living it was a surprise to find anything in its proper place.

The first sip of the medicine came up almost as soon as it went down. He tried another. Followed an uncertainty period of several minutes. Gradually he began feeling better. So much better he was able to finish the soup.

Margaret returned.

"Why, you've finished your soup! I knew something hot would help."

She took his hand.

"Those roses and card were just beautiful. But what was the occasion?"

"Just wanted show how much I love you."

She kissed him.

"Charles, you're the most wonderful husband in the world. But what could have made you so sick?"

"Don't know."

"What did the doctor say?"

"Said I needed a vacation."

"Exactly what I said!" Margaret declared. "Slaving away at that old PGS office everyday. How I wish you could quit that place!"

"Me? Quit? At my age?"

"Well, if you could just do *something!*"

TWO HOURS LATER Chuck sauntered into the PGS office, a clean, smooth-shaven Charles, in a neat nice fitting suit. It fit much better since he had gotten rid of the bulge made by the medicine bottle. A few minutes earlier there had been an inch of liquid in the bottle. The bottle, empty now, was reposing in a far corner of the washroom.

He gave their receptionist an elaborate bow, smiled blandly at some of the girls, and floated over to his desk. First he made a note on his deskpad: "Call Dr. Einasco about refill." He had scarcely time to glance at his mail when Miss Clemence was standing by. He had the feeling she had been on the watch, waiting to pounce.

"Mr. Henderson's been asking for you all morning. He wants to see you real bad."

Chuck twitched slightly.

"Not *bad*, Miss Clemence. *Badly*. Always use the *ly* form when expressing action."

"Well, don't say you weren't warned."

Somehow her mild reproof in-

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furiated him beyond all reason.

"What's he want?"

"He wants the rewrites on that Innergo and Aunt Bella copy."

"*Rewrites!* Why bother? What's the use? When it's the same damn crap every year?"

His words carried to the outermost boundaries of the PGS offices. Not that his voice was so loud. Rather it was because the room had grown so still.

For once Miss Clemence was stricken speechless. Mr. Devons had thrown open his door. For several moments he stood motionless. Then he advanced slowly toward Moffat's desk, a certain glint in his eyes, his imperious magisterial glint.

"Mr. Moffat, Miss Clemence is within a foot of your desk," he said in a low calm voice. "I'm sure your remarks should be quite audible at that distance."

He straightened a long roll of papers.

"This matter is most pressing, Mr. Moffat. We cannot proceed with the visuals until you have inspected these layouts. Inspect them with the utmost care. Ask yourself, *Do they attract the attention of the desired audience? Do they convey information to that audience? Do they stimulate a desire to buy?*"

The first depicted a motherly woman administering a spoonful of Innergo to a child in a flannel nightgown. The child was gratefully receiving the potion presumed to provoke the reaction desired in its lower bowel.

Chuck seized his blue pencil.

"Slash the old lady. Put in a sexy young nurse in a miniskirt. Change the kid to a young fellow in a hospital bed. He's naked from the waist up. Make the caption read *Desire comes out when INNERGO goes in.*

"And this thing on Vigerol. Put in girl in a flimsy gown. Figure clearly visible from sun shining through it. Both arms reaching toward a good looking medium age man. Eager gleam in their eyes. Caption at top *Love's Arousal.* Caption at bottom *Nature Couldn't But VIGEROL Could.*"

Vainly Mr. Devons was trying to restrain him. Mr. Devons was master of the tight lip and frigid gaze. But physical effort was out of his range. Chuck could tell by his clumsy gestures. He let fly with an equally clumsy right hand punch. What the blow lacked in accuracy it made up in momentum. So much momentum that Chuck went along with it, sprawling belly-flat across his desk, his legs hanging down one side, his head down the other.

The last he remembered was the horrified gaze of the girls. Mr. Devons' bewildered expression. And Mr. Henderson, staring grimly, hands in pockets, legs slightly separated.

After which he became very, very sick.

A WEEK LATER.

Charles and Margaret reading the morning paper. Charles' eyes on a brassière advertisement. Margaret pausing occasionally over some item.

"It says here there's a frog war started in Malaysia," she remarked.

"A what?"

"Frog war. In Malaysia. Thousands of frogs fighting each other."

A long silence.

"Charles."

"Yeah?"

"Are you really deeply interested in luxury bras for the élite woman? You've been staring at that advertisement for the last five minutes."

"Have I? Didn't notice."

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Margaret folded her paper.

"Charles, we can't go on this way much longer. So you were sick at the office. Everybody's sick sometimes."

"Not the way I was sick."

"Why don't you see that internist again?"

"No use."

"A psychiatrist then?"

Charles nodded gloomily.

"Put me away for good. You could see me Christmas. Bake me a cake with sprig of holly on top."

Margaret did not respond. She glanced out the window.

"There's the postman. I'll go get the mail."

Charles didn't stir. The phone rang. It rang three times. The fourth time he picked up the receiver.

"Charles Moffat residence."

"Hello, Moffat. Henderson calling from PGS. Haven't seen you around lately."

Chuck hesitated.

"I. . .I meant to come around. Apologize to everybody. Just couldn't seem to nerve myself up to it."

Henderson chuckled.

"That was quite a spasm you threw."

"I just can't explain it."

"Take my advice and don't try." Then in a more serious tone. "PGS has been going downhill. I'd been planning a shakeup. But you got ahead of me. We've already incorporated some of your ideas in next year's publicity. Sales force is going wild."

"Say, gosh, Mr. Henderson. Awfully nice of you to call."

Margaret came in with the mail.

"Why the dazed look?"

"Guess who called. Mr. Henderson, that's who."

"Honest?"

"He wants me back. He *liked* my crazy ideas."

It took a long time for the Moffats to settle back to normal.

"Letter for you," said Margaret. "Probably a bill from Dr. Einasco."

"He said there wouldn't be any bill."

Charles slit open the envelope and extracted a letter.

My dear Mr. Moffat:

I regret to inform you it will be impossible to obtain a refill of that pharmaceutical. The active ingredient is a hitherto wholly unknown new volatile, limpid, water-miscible hydroxyl, tentatively designated alcohol. Its exceptional properties are as yet so unpredictable as to require prolonged intensive research. This research is now underway at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands.

My correspondent, one of the world's foremost neuropharmacologists, predicts that the genever *as known in Dutch, or* gin *in English, will eventually be hailed as one of the greatest psychedelic discoveries of the century.*

Yours most sincerely,
H. K. Einasto, M.D.

P.S. The sample of genever *in your possession should be discarded, as having a 60 per cent alcohol content (120 proof in English terminology), much in excess of the therapeutic dosage.*

Charles read the letter several times without comment.

"Interesting?" Margaret inquired.

"All about a newly discovered drug in Holland. Chief interest would be to highly trained pharmacologists."

He glanced over the letter again.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, "the stuff might be of considerable significance some day."

—PHILIP LATHAM

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SANGRE

LISA TUTTLE

A change of pace for Ms. Tuttle—whose stories for our companion magazine; AMAZING ("Stone Circle," March, 1976; "Mrs. T," September, 1976), have caused considerable controversy—an almost traditional fantasy . . .

Illustrated by Richard Olsen

GLENDA STEPPED OUT of the shower and stopped before the mirror. Her hair looped up and confined beneath a shower cap left her long neck bare and made her eyes look larger and darker.

"You look Spanish," Steve said.

She didn't turn, but continued staring at herself in the mirror, her beautiful face impassive.

He put his hands on her wet shoulders, bent his head to kiss her neck.

"Dry me," she said.

He picked up a towel and patted her reverently, tenderly dry. She reached up and pulled off the cap and let her hair tumble, a flow of honey and brown, to her waist. He caught his breath.

"When is checkout?" she asked.

"Noon."

Now she turned to face him. "And then what? After we leave an hour from now, then what?"

"Anything you want. I'll take you to lunch anywhere you say, and then we'll have time to do a little shopping before you have to be at the airport. Anything you want." His eyes pleaded with her.

"Anything you want," she mimicked. Her face contorted in anger; she gave the towel he still held a jerk and wrapped it around herself. "How can you?"

"Glenda—"

"I'm not talking about today! I'm talking about what *after* today? When I come back, do we just pretend it never happened? Do we just forget about us? How can you take me out and screw me, and then go tripping home to my mother? And what is this trip to Spain thing? Can't you handle it anymore? Mother getting suspicious?"

"Darling, don't. Of course I don't want you out of the way. I love you. And I love your mother. Believe me, this is as hard for me—"

"Oh, sure it is. Just tell me this—why should I be the one to lose? What happens to *me* after you marry my mother?"

"Sweetheart, try to understand . . ."

"Oh, yes, *I'm* the one who has to understand, and Mother's the one

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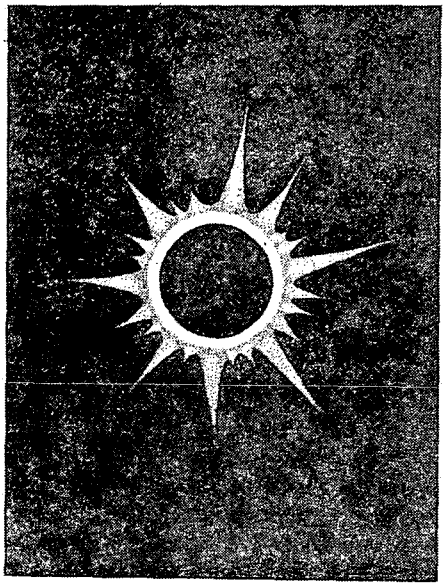
who doesn't suspect. Just how long do you think that's going to last?"

"In time," he said, straining for patience, for the sound of wisdom in his voice, "In time I hope we . . . the three of us . . . can work something out. But this is very difficult. You, you're young, while people like your mother and myself are very much shackled by the old morality, you can accept relationships that are . . . more free . . . and in time, maybe after your mother and I are married, the three of us can . . ." he faltered and stopped. Her expression mocked him.

"I never lied to you," he said, suddenly defensive, suddenly angrily sure that he was making a fool of himself, "You knew what you were getting into; you knew who I was when you became my mistress—"

"Mistress." She said the word with loathing, and he caught the steely glint of hatred in her eyes. He tried to recoup but before he could speak she shook her head impatiently and let the towel drop.

"Well," she said. "We've still got an hour."



DEBBIE OPENED her mouth and desperately forced a yawn as the plane began to take off. As the air pressure stabilized she turned to Glenda and said approvingly, "Your stepfather is good-looking."

"Steve's not my stepfather."

"Well, whatever. They're getting married soon, aren't they?"

"July. Right after I come back from Spain." Glenda laid her cheek against the window and shut her eyes.

"He looks awfully young."

Glenda shrugged. "A couple of years younger than my mother."

Debbie bent her dark head over her copy of *The Sun Also Rises* when it became obvious that Glenda was in

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no mood for conversation. The two had played together as children and remained friends into the same college in an undemanding, almost superficial fashion.

Glenda chewed her lip. "Look what he gave me," she said suddenly, holding out her hand. "Steve, I mean." It was a silver ring, very simple, the ends bent into a curving s design. It had been made for her while she watched in the narrow dark handcrafts shop, clutching Steve's hand with emotion she didn't show on her calm face.

Debbie nodded. "Pretty. He's paying for this trip, isn't he?"

"He insisted. And Mother—well, she's so hung up on him that whatever he says is fine with her."

"I think it's great," Debbie said. "Your mother getting married again. And you like him so much, too."

"Oh, we're great friends."

THEIR ROOM in Seville had two beds, a red-brick floor and a balcony from which could be seen la Giralda, the Moorish tower. Glenda stood on the balcony in the evening, the heat of the day already fading from the air, and watched the swallows dip and soar around the tower, pink-auraed from the setting sun.

Glenda had not known why, but coming to Seville after the noise and cars of grey Madrid had felt like coming home. She had led Debbie (plump Debbie panting a little under her packpack) through the winding streets as if guided by something, coming upon the little hotel and finding it perfect without feeling surprise. But at the same time she felt giddy, her stomach clenched with excitement, the way she always felt on those rare occasions when she was to be alone with Steve. With evening the feeling of something impending had become stronger and Glenda felt reality slipping away from her as if it were a dream.

She put a hand to her cheek and found it unnaturally hot. She turned back into the room where Debbie was putting on a skirt.

"It's nearly eight," Debbie said. "I think it's legal to go out to dinner now."

Glenda felt herself drifting as they sat at dinner, and blamed it on the wine when Debbie commented on her inattentiveness. Things were slipping away from her. Everything seemed unnaturally bright and unreal as if she watched it on a screen in a dark, muffled room.

Once back, Glenda went straight to bed while Debbie wrote a letter to her parents.

"Sure the light won't bother you?"

"I'm sure." It was an effort to say the words. The room went spinning away from her, telescoping into another world, and Glenda slept.

She woke, her mouth dry. Debbie was a dark lump in the next bed. The shutters were open and moonlight sliced into the room. Glenda felt ragingly hot. With part of her mind she noted that fact and it registered that perhaps she was sick, with a fever. Her own body began to seem as remote to her as everything else around her.

There was someone on the balcony. Now he blocked the light, now he moved and it illuminated him. There was the tightness of terror in her throat, but her mind clicked observations into her consciousness as unemotionally as a typewriter.

He wore a cloak, and some sort of slouch-brimmed hat. Polished boots gleamed in the moonlight, and was that a sword hung at his side? Don

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Juan? noted a cooly amused voice within her. Come to seduce this Andalusian beauty? Oh, really?

He made no move to enter the room and she gained some measure of courage from that, enough to raise herself on her elbows and stare at him. If he noticed her movement he made no sign. She sat up then and swung her legs over the side of the bed. The room receded and advanced dizzingly before it settled into its detached and unreal, but at least stable, form.

He was waiting for her on the balcony. She opened her mouth to speak, to end the joke, to let him know she was awake and that, perhaps, he had come to the wrong window. But to speak seemed a desecration, a monumental undertaking of which she was not capable.

He opened his arms to her, that cloaked figure, his face masked by shadow, and waited for her to step into them. She saw herself as if from a distance, a somnambulant figure in a long white gown, long hair flowing, face pale and innocent from sleep, and she watched this figure move into the waiting arms.

She looked up, he moved his head and the moonlight spilled fully across his features. She realized then that it was not Don Juan at all, but another legend entirely; the pasty face, the oddly peaked eyebrows, the parted red lips over which pointed teeth gleamed . . . Her head fell back against his arm, her eyes closed and her sacrificial neck gleamed white and pure.

"Glenda?"

A rush of nausea hit her; she opened her eyes, stumbled, and caught herself at the railing.

"Glen, are you all right?"

Glenda turned her head and saw Debbie—no one else, only Debbie—solid and comforting in pink nylon.

"I was hot," she said, and had to clear her throat and say it again. She was hot, and very thirsty. "Is there anything to drink?"

"Part of that liter of Coke from the train. Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yes, yes . . . only thirsty." She gulped the Coke desperatly but it burned her throat. She choked and felt sick. "G'night." She crawled back into bed and would say nothing more to Debbie who finally sighed and went back to sleep herself.

"I HATE to leave you alone," Debbie said, hovering uncertainly at the door. "How do you feel?"

Glenda lay in bed. "Really, it's nothing. I just don't feel up to anything today. But I am not so sick that I can't make it down three flights to get the manager or his wife if I need something. You go out sightseeing with that nice Canadian and don't worry about me. I'll get some sleep. Best thing."

"You're sure? You wouldn't rather move to a bigger hotel? So we'd have our own bathroom?"

"Of course not. I like it here."

"Well . . . Shall I bring you anything?"

"Something to drink. A bottle of wine. I'm so thirsty."

"I don't think wine . . . well, I'll get you something."

And finally Debbie was gone. Glenda relaxed her stranglehold on a reality that had become more strange and tenuous with every passing second. She fell.

SHE was on the street called Death, one of the narrow, cobbled streets bound on each side by houses painted a blinding white. The name of the

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street was painted in blue on a tile set into one of the houses: "Muerte."

The girl had been crying. She was dirty and her face was sticky with tears and dirt. It was siesta and she was alone on the quiet street but she knew that she would not be alone for long. And they must not find her. She knew that she must leave the city for safety, but the thought of wandering alone through the countryside frightened her as much as did the thought of remaining and so she was at an impasse, incapable of action.

If they found her, they would take their vengance on her although she had done nothing, was innocently involved. She thought of the past month, of the widespread sickness throughout the town, of the deaths—bodies found in the street, pale and dead with the unmistakable marks upon their necks—and of the fear, the growing terror.

Her mother had taken to staying out all night, returning pale and exhausted at dawn to fall into a heavy sleep. But as she slept she smiled, and the girl, standing by the pillow and smoothing her mother's tangled hair, found the words of the townspeople creeping, unwanted, into her mind. Was it true, what they said, that she consorted with the devil? That her mother with her lover swooped through the night in the form of bats, seeking out unwary night travellers, to waylay them and drink their blood? She began to be frightened of her mother, while still loving her, and watched through half-closed eyes as her mother crept out every night. And finally one night had ended without bringing her mother home and the girl had been alone ever since.

She wandered, not knowing where to go, hungry and thirsty but too frightened to knock on a door and ask for wine and shelter. It grew later, and as it grew dark doors began to close and people went hurridly in twos and threes. Once the streets had been as filled with lanterns as a summer meadow is filled with fireflies, but now there was a monster abroad.

The moon came up and gave her light and finally she came to a small plaza with a fountain in the center. But the fountain was dead and dry and she leaned against it, crying with frustration until she was too tired to cry more.

Something made her look up, some feeling of danger. The moon was high. A man stood in one of the four entrances to the plaza, a man draped in the folds of an all-encompassing cloak. The toes of his boots gleamed as did his eyes, two points of light beneath his slouch hat.

She kept still, hoping he had not noticed her in the shadows.

"Daughter," he said, in a voice like dry leaves in the wind.

An involuntary twitch.

"My darling daughter." He took a step forward.

She was running, never looking back, sobbing deep in her throat and running down one street and then another, perilously afraid that she would run a circle and reenter the plaza to find him there . . . she ran. Then down a street she should not have taken, a cul-de-sac. She turned to escape and found him there, in her way.

She was rigid. The dry leaves rustled in his throat as he came toward her.

He raised his arms and his cloak as if they were joined, as if he were draped in huge wings which he would fold around the two of them. His lips parted; she could hear his breathing,

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could see the gleam of his teeth. She fell.

GLENDA WOKE, trembling violently.

"Did I wake you up? Honey, are you all right? You look pale as a ghost. We're going for lunch, do you want—"

Glenda shook her head. "Uh, I'm not feeling too great." The words felt torn from her raw throat. She was thirsty. "Did you get me something to drink?"

"Oh, I'm sorry—I forgot. What would you like? I'll run get it for you. And something to eat?"

Glenda shook her head again. "No. Just a drink." It was hard to concentrate, harder still to focus.

Debbie came to the bed and reached toward Glenda who pulled away violently.

"Glen, I just want to see if you have a fever. Hmmm . . . you are pretty hot. My God, what'd you do to your neck?"

Glenda carressed the twin shallow wounds with her fingertips and shook her head.

"I think we should get you to a hospital."

"No. I'll be . . . I'll take some aspirin . . . I'll stay . . . I'll be all right . . ." Debbie's face was blurring and clearing like something seen from underwater.

She fell.

THE MOON was down and the sky beginning to lighten when she opened her eyes. She was sprawled on the cobblestones of a short narrow street and got painfully to her feet. She was ragingly thirsty—her mouth felt gummy, her tongue too large. She pushed her hair back, away from her face, with both hands and felt the trace of something sticky. She returned her hand for a lingering exploration and remembered the marks on the necks of certain townspeople, and remembered their eventual deaths.

She travelled twisting streets until she came within sight of la Giralda. The rising sun illumined it and she saw a single bat hanging like a curled leaf in the tower.

The people of Seville, in the form of two drunken men, had at one time attempted to keep the devil (who was reputed to inhabit the Moorish tower in the form of a bat) in his resting place and out of the streets of Seville by boarding up the door. But it was pointed out to them that, even assuming wooden slats could keep the devil prisoner, bats did not need to fly through doorways when the tower had so many windows, and they abandoned their project half-finished.

She climbed over the uncompleted barricade, scratching her leg as she did so. She watched the tiny beads of blood appear in a curving line and then looked away. And now, up? To the bell tower where hung bells which never rang? And then she saw a door to one side, a wooden door free of spider webs, as if it were often used. She went to it and pushed it open, revealing steps which led down into darkness. She left the door open behind her, for the little light its being open provided, and descended the steps. They were shallow steps, but there were a great many of them. Her legs began to ache from the seemingly endless descent.

At the bottom was a huge chamber, she could not tell how large, poorly lit by torches burning smokily in wall-niches. She saw the coffin at once, and went to it. It was open and inside, his slouch hat discarded but still clothed in cape and boots, was the man she had run from in the night;

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the man her mother had loved, or served.

A bat flew at her head, silent and deadly. She ducked, but felt the edge of its leathery wings across her cheek. She turned and ran for the stairs; the bat did not pursue her.

Upstairs, in the daylight, she rested and thought of what she had seen. She thought of his cruel face, and of his blood-red lips. Slowly she licked her own dry lips and, unconciously, her hand went toward her throat. Was he the devil, or something else? The devil could not be killed, but something else . . .

Her hands were covered with tiny cuts and full of splinters when she was done, but she had her weapon: a large, sharply pointed piece of wood. Outside there was a pile of rubble and she found a brick. An old woman in black, an early riser, glared at her suspiciously as she passed, but said nothing.

When she entered the chamber again the bat dove at her and flew around her head. She ducked her head to keep it from her eyes, but she did not let it deter her. She put the brick down to grasp the wooden stake with both dirty, bloody hands and plunge it into the man's heart. She was blinded by her hair, and then by her own blood as the bat bit and tore at her head, but finally the stake was anchored and she was rewarded with a low moan from her victim. The bat chittered once, a screech of defeat, and flapped away. She raised the brick and brought it down with all her might on the stake.

There was a scream, which seemed to come from the walls around her, and then a fountain of blood spattered her chest, arms and head. She kept pounding, unwilling or unable to stop, until the stake must have been driven entirely through him, and then, triumphant, she threw the brick away and stood, panting, watching the still bubbling blood.

It was very quiet. And then the thirst assailed her, sweeping away all pains and triumphs with its intensity. She sank to her knees, laid her face to his chest, and drank and drank until she was sated.

GLENDA OPENED her eyes. The room was empty and sunlight lay warm on the red bricks and white walls of the room. Everything was hard and clear to her now; the fever must have passed. Things had a diamond edge on them now, with textures and solidity she had never noticed before.

Debbie came in, from off the balcony, looking startled to see Glenda sitting up.

"Well! How do you feel? You really had us worried."

"'Us?'"

"Roger, the Canadian from down the hall. He's gone for a doctor."

"I don't need a doctor. Didn't I tell you—"

"Yeah, right before you fainted. Lie down, will you? Take it easy. How do you feel?"

"Fine. Excellent. Never better."

"Well, just stay in bed. Do you want something to drink?"

"No thanks." She lay back.

THE DOCTOR found nothing wrong with Glenda although he was puzzled by the marks on her neck. When his inquisition began to annoy her she pretended not to understand his actually quite adequate English, and pulled the sheet over her head, complaining that the light hurt her eyes and that she was very tired.

Glenda was very determined and very persuasive and came at last to be

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seated on a 747 headed for New York. Debbie—poor, confused Debbie—remained in Spain, travelling now with her Canadian and his friends.

"You ought at least to cable your mother," Debbie had said, but Glenda had shaken her head, smiling. "I'll surprise her—take a cab in." Steve would be with her mother, she knew. It would be early morning when she arrived and they would not be awake yet, but sweetly sleeping. They would be asleep in each other's arms, not expecting her.

Glenda smiled at the blackness beyond her window and touched her silver ring. She pulled it off and toyed with it, tracing the "S" with her finger. S *for Steve*, she thought, And S *for Spain*. She suddenly caught the ring between her fingers and pulled at it, distorting the S shape and forcing it finally into a design like twin curved horns. Then she held it and clenched it tightly until the blood came.

—LISA TUTTLE

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VENGENCE IS MINE

In this, the Age of Assassination, the act has become almost a media event–which is exactly what this one had in mind!

TED WHITE

Illustrated by JOE STATON

I WAS BROUGHT into human existence on Tuesday, August 7th, 1985. The first thing I did was to take a small room at a hotel on 42nd St., just east of Times Square. And, once settled in the sparsely furnished room, the second thing I did was to strip, clean, oil and reassemble my Schnikkle TN-4 handgun. The third thing I had to do was to kill Herbert L. Foreman.

The hotel room, in common with those in this neighborhood, was squalid; the hotel served mostly prostitutes and those down on their luck. I had sufficient money for better, but there seemed no reason to waste it, and the location was ideal for my purposes. I did have a TV set brought up, however, and as I carefully took down the gun I watched the six o'clock news on an ancient Zenith.

Herbert Foreman was in the news; as I'd expected. Since his spectacular challenge on Sunday's *Meet The Press*, he had gained considerable fame, if not notoriety, and the commentator was speculating on that fact.

"Some observers in New York City were suggesting, today, that Foreman's much publicized statements about atheism in public office are just a clever bid for publicity for his current campaign for a seat in the House. They've noted that in a field of five, Foreman was not—until now—a frontrunner and had been conducting a rather lacklustre campaign. Our Gabe Michaels caught Mr. Foreman after a speech on the upper west side today, and asked him about that . . ."

The picture shifted to taped footage. A tall, handsome man very much in the Kennedy-Lindsay-Carter image was being questioned by the reporter.

"Mr. Foreman, there's been talk that your, umm, sensational statement on Sunday's *Meet The Press* was one cynically calculated to win you headlines. Have you any comment on this?"

Foreman nodded. "Yes, indeed. As you know, Gabe, I have sworn to carry the issue of atheism in public office to the Supreme Court, if necessary. I feel very strongly that the right to religious freedom in this country is just that—freedom for me to choose any religion I want, or no religion at all. I will not be a hypocrite and I don't believe my supporters want me to be a hypocrite.

"We're living in an enlightened age, Gabe. The Supreme Court has struck down a number of the holdovers from the days of the Puritans and their peculiar form of religious intol-

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erance. Today the United States has as many Buddhists as it does Presbyterians, and nobody believes any more that the sole fault with Communism is its 'Godlessness.'

"This is the Space Age. Man has gone to the moon, and to Mars. We may be on Venus soon. It's a time for realism. The Baptist Revival has run its course. You know, for centuries man expected God to make things better for him some day—the old story, you're familiar with it, pie in the sky, bye and bye. Now we've shouldered our own burdons. Man is bettering his own lot. Religion no longer plays a vital role in man's life today. We just don't *need* that God any more.

"Well, I believe in honesty and I think my supporters are behind me all the way, there. I am not going to sign or declare an oath of allegiance to God, because I am an atheist. I don't believe in God. I believe in Man."

There was more, but I waited for the news I wanted: tomorrow Foreman would be appearing at a rally in Madison Square Garden. I made a note of the time to myself and turned off the set.

The next morning I rose promptly, shaved, showered and dressed. The Schnikkle TN-4 had a special fourteen-inch barrel for accuracy, and I had to adjust the open-toed shoulder holster carefully before I could make a smooth draw. I practised first with my coat off, then again with it buttoned in place. The coat had no inside pocket, so the chances of catching and snagging were minimized. Nonetheless, I practised several minutes on a smooth and unobtrusive draw. Finally I checked out of my room and went out onto the street.

It was a cool day for New York in August; the temperature was in the

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mid-70's. A blueish haze hung over the city, making the more distant buildings blue silhouettes as I stared down Broadway. The air smelled of salt, a reminder that I was on a narrow island surrounded on all sides by water. The sunlight was thin and carried with it little heat.

I walked over to the Library at Fifth Avenue and 42nd, and stared at the pitted stone lions flanking its entrance. Then I walked around its side, to Bryant Park, and bought an ice-cream stick from a man with a cart. The chocolate melted and fell from the ice cream before I finished it.

I took a seat on a park bench between two elderly men, both of whom were reading much-folded newspapers. As I sat, eating my ice cream, first one and then the other got up, leaving his paper behind. Shortly the seat of each had been taken by another, almost indistinguishable old man, who picked up and began reading the same paper.

I had nothing to do, so I watched the people in the park.

There was a variety of them: perhaps half were old people, sunning themselves, reading, gossiping. There was a scattering of younger people, some of them eating their lunches and obviously from nearby office buildings. One of these was a young woman whose age I guessed to be between 18 and 22. When the man on my right put down his paper and left, she approached my bench and hesitated.

"This your paper, Mister?"

"No. Go right ahead and take it. I think it goes with the seat."

"Oh, no thanks. I already read it." She pushed it over to make room, pushing it into an untidy pile between us.

I looked more closely at her. Young, still in the first bloom of post-adolescense. Pretty, in an obvious, over-made-up way. Dark hair cut short, dark brows, button nose, full lips—and eyes that stared back at me knowingly.

She gestured at my nearly gone ice cream, a small lump on a stick. "Lunch?" she asked.

I nodded.

"That's a quick one," she said. "You got time for another quickie?"

I let my gaze rake her, up and down, before I replied. "You don't look like one," I said. "Out of uniform?"

"Don't get me wrong, Mister," she said, pausing to shift her cud of chewing gum. "I'm no pro. I just like to pick up a little spending money, you know, on my lunch break."

"I see. Well, you're wasting your time on me. I'm not interested in the sins of the flesh."

"Oh, really?" She stood up. "Well, begging your pardon, Mister—I never took you for a Christer. Excuse me, *please*." Sarcasm mingled with disappointment in her voice. I watched her move away, walking quickly as if she needed to get out of my sight in a hurry, then slowing as she approached another bench and fresh opportunities. I sighed and shook my head. I wondered if I was too little, and too late.

Foreman's was to be an afternoon rally, so after several hours of watching the games played in the park I began my walk westwards and downtown. On 42nd St. I was harrassed by a young man with a shaved head and dirty robes who wanted my money. I gave him a little. Then he demanded more. He followed me for a block. As I passed through Times Square I bought two hotdogs and an exotic fruit drink, and noted the

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temperature on an illuminated sign was now 79°. Hunger was a foreign sensation to me, and of relatively little moment, but I considered it best to maintain my body well, even if it was to be of use to me for very little more time.

Foreman had gathered to him a good-sized crowd, and it took me twenty minutes to worm myself into the front rows. Then I had to wait another half hour until he came forward to the speakers' podium.

It was an awkward angle, since only his head and shoulders offered a target. Fortunately, a .14 calibre, needlepoint Schnikkle with a fourteen-inch barrel is extremely accurate at close range, and, in any case, with a magnum load it would hardly matter which part of his body I hit, so long as it wasn't an extemity like a finger. Hydrostatic shock would do the rest, causing a massive corinary failure. A Schnikkle needlepoint bullet virtually disintegrates when it hits anything solid, its velocity is so high.

I waited until Foreman was into his speech and had assumed a fairly stationary stance. It was basically the same speech with which he'd caused the headlines. I thought it appropriate to wait until he reached its climax.

"—And I say there is no God in Twentieth Century America! I say that God is dead! And if I'm wrong, let Him prove it to me! Let him—"

I slipped out my gun with one smooth, practiced motion, lifted it and sighted it, and fired directly at his chest.

I don't know whether he saw me or whether it was a chance movement, but he ducked. He leaned forward over the podium, and he ducked.

My shot caught him squarely in the face and blew his head off.

His headless body was jerked backwards by the impact and then, perhaps still reacting to an earlier order, stumbled forward against the podium. The stand fell over, scattering microphones, and Herbert L. Foreman's corpse pitched over it and into the crowd below.

At first the crowd was stunned. No one had paid any attention to me when I had drawn and sighted; I had done it in one fast, practised movement and had gone unnoticed until the moment of the shot. Even then, I think, most of those in the crowd could not take their eyes off the sight of Foreman's final movements—even to see where the shot had come from.

I calmly reholstered my gun and waited.

It happened quickly: four quiet-looking men in anonymous business suits materilized from out of the shrinking crowd and surrounded me.

They were very efficient. Two of them had my hands behind my back and in cuffs while the third took my gun, broke out the magazine, sniffed the barrel, and noted that the magazine held nothing. "Pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?" he said.

They began hustling me through the crowd but I looked up and saw the boom angled out over our heads, now swooping down close. A man with a minicam leaned down toward us.

"Good work, you guys—is this the assassin?" A shot gun mike swivled toward us.

One of my captors looked directly into the camera's eye. "We believe he is. He was carrying on his person a high-powered, foreign handgun which he was personally observed to fire at the victim. This gun—" he brandished the weapon for the TV camera "—has been fired quite recently."

(cont. on page 132)

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THE EARTH BOOKS

ROBERT F. YOUNG

Robert Young, whose stories have appeared regularly both here and in our companion magazine, AMAZING SF, *returns with a remarkable story about an author and his creation—*

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

MY MUSE does the darnedest things. Her favorite trick, of course, is hiding on me. The other day when she came up missing I found her down at the corner bar, sipping a slow gin, and last night after searching through the whole house for her I found her sitting all alone on the back porch steps, gazing up at the stars. And it was only ten above, mind you!

"What in the world are you doing, sitting out here on a night like this looking at the stars?" I asked her sternly (not too sternly, of course: Muses take offense easily, and when they do they go away and if they're real mad they never come back).

She pointed heavenward at the constellation Auriga where bright Capella shone. "That's my birthplace," she said. "If you came from another planet, wouldn't you look up at it now and then, even if you couldn't see it?"

"Not on a night like this. Not when it's ten above. I'd wait till spring, or, if I couldn't wait, I'd move down south. And if I couldn't wait and I couldn't move, I'd at least put my overcoat on."

"Tsk. You writers are all alike: Chicken. On Capella XII we consider weather like this a heat wave. As a matter of fact, when the temperature gets all the way up to ten, we carry fans with us and fan ourselves."

"Cardboard fans?"

"Well we don't carry air conditioners, if that's what you mean."

"In summer it must be lots warmer."

"Summer is when I'm talking about. In winter it gets so cold the air freezes. Then we throw oxygen snowballs at each other to keep warm."

"Well at least that's better than carrying fans with you wherever you go."

"It would be if we didn't have to carry oxygen tanks on our shoulders and wear masks. I think I'll go back inside and have a cold glass of lemonade. Are there any ice cubes?"

"There's a tray in the freezer."

CAPELLA XII didn't turn out to be half as bad as she'd tried to make out. Granted, their mean temperature is considerably lower than Earth's; but there are days in mid-summer when you can go around in your shirtsleeves if you happen to be the manly type, and there are even jungles in some of the equatorial regions. As for the Capellans having to carry oxygen tanks in winter, she made that up. The air doesn't freeze, except maybe at the poles, and nobody lives there except the Scudges, who don't

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need air in the first place.

However, Capella XII's climate is one thing, Capellan XII civilization quite another. The less said about it, the better, although I suppose you could find worse ones if you looked hard enough. I could understand now why my *Muse* had moved to Earth. Nevertheless, certain basic similarities exist between it and my own, and I had no great trouble adjusting, once I'd mastered the major language.

Among the most fascinating—to me, anyway—of the professions that thrive there is the writing profession. There are writers galore, among them a literary giant who for decades has been writing imaginative stories set on a planet named Earth. The Earth Books, they're called. What's most remarkable about them is that he doesn't even know there *is* an Earth. He made his up. But in many respects it's uncannily like the real thing. It's located in the right sector of space, it's the third of nine planets orbiting a GO star, it has a 24-hour day and a 365-day year. It even has a moon. You name it, and *iii*'s Earth has it. *iii* is the imaginative writer's pen name.

AFTER READING the Earth Books I decided that as long as I was visiting Capella XII I might as well have a chat with their remarkable creator, and learning that he lived not far from where I was staying, I arranged a meeting with him through his agent.

Seen from the air, his ranch Tircina brings to mind the inner surface of a shallow crimson soup dish. The ranch buildings are in the exact center, and the concave terrain surrounding them is dotted with grazing Capellan cattle. A small green lake just south of the buildings looks for all the world like a left-over drop of pea soup.

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A graying but still sturdy individual in his early 70's, some 30 pounds of books behind him, *iii* came forth to greet me when his butler, after admitting me to the main structure (an imposing three-storied affair with four cupolas and two towers), ushered me into the drawing room and left. It was clear to me from the eager light that came into the old author's deep-set eyes as we shook hands (a custom as common on Capella XII as on Earth) that he seldom had visitors any more; that despite the wheelbarrows full of money his books still brought in their creator had faded into the background. I had let it be known that I worked for a weekly periodical, deeming it kinder not to impugn the validity of his make-believe Earth by revealing my true provenance. Thus, I was doubly welcome—as a visitor and as an interviewer as well.

iii indicated two comfortable chairs facing a wide window that looked out upon an expanse of red sward pied with grazing Capellan steers. "As you can see," he said without preamble, "I lead a somewhat solitary existence these days. My children have grown up and left, and my wife spends most of her time traveling on the continent, collecting bric-a-brac, antique furniture and just plain junk. But I don't mind."

"Do you still write?" I asked.

"Oh yes. A book every six months, just as always. And always the same one." *iii* chuckled.

"I've always been an avid fan of yours," I lied, "and I've always marveled at the vividness of your imagination. But it's your Earth Books that intrigue me the most, even though they constitute only an insignificant part of your output. If we may, I'd like to discuss them."

A slight turning down of the corners of *iii's* mouth betrayed a mild disappointment, and I instantly divined its cause: his Earth Books, while popular enough in their own right, have not sold nearly as many copies as his Tircin Books, and on Capella XII a writer's heart is where his treasure is. I had skimmed through his Tircin series, and quite frankly they had left me cold. I have no quarrel with talking animals or with brachiating superheroes; but I am, despite my affinity for imaginative literature, or perhaps because of it, highly critical of pedestrian excursions into a genre that demands a light—almost a magic—touch.

iii quickly banished his disappointment behind a pleasant smile that softened the set lines of his bull-dog-like countenance. "Please proceed," he said graciously.

"I am intrigued almost as much by the hero of the Earth Books as I am by his heroic deeds," I went on. "Or perhaps I should say 'puzzled'. Does he perhaps have a real-life prototype?"

iii shook his head. "I made him up. Out of whole cloth."

I had surmised as much.

"What is it about Thon Karther that puzzles you?" *iii* asked.

"Well, I'll overlook the fact that he doesn't age physically. You cover that pretty well by attributing it to 'genetic transformations engendered by his astral journey', just as you cover the Princess' seeming agelessness to 'certain goddess-like qualities inherent in her gentle nature'. I guess what puzzles me the most about Thon is his motivation."

iii seemed surprised. "His motivation! Why, I thought that was crystal clear. He wants to serve his adopted country in every way he can, to bring an end to senseless bloodshed. Thon

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Karther, I'll have you know, is an idealist of the highest order."

"All that may be true, but you must admit there're certain vital inconsistencies in his character. He professes to hate war, yet he fights like a demon in every one that comes along. And he also professes to hate underhandedness, yet he never shows his own hand, or himself either whenever he can avoid doing so. And finally there's his ultimate apostasy—"

"*Apostasy!*" *iii* seemed shocked.

"Let's begin at the beginning," I said. "In *A Princess of Earth*, he arrives on Earth, following his miraculous astral journey, in the midst of a world-wide conflict. No sooner does he get there than the country he subsequently adopts as his own becomes involved in the action. Whereupon he immediately enlists and fights furiously in its behalf. So furiously does he fight, in fact, and so many of the Bad Guys does he dispatch, the reader gets the impression that he virtually wins the war single-handed. Yet he remains a nonentity insofar as his adopted countrymen are concerned, and somehow manages never to be mentioned in any of the news media. He virtually drops out of sight. This despite the fact that after the war is over he wins and marries the Princess for whom, presumably at least, the Good Guys were fighting."

"Aside from the fact that Thon Karther, beneath his warrior's veneer, is a modest, unassuming man who doesn't *want* fame," *iii* said coldly, "there is in this instance a physical explanation for his dropping out of sight. If you will reread the book you will find that shortly after his marriage to the Princess he undergoes a second astral transition—this time back to Capella XII—"

"Where," I went on quickly, "he languishes for some twenty-three years before at last acquiring the ability to project his astral self at will through time and space. Re-arriving back on Earth (*The Gods of Earth:* Chapter I), he finds that his Princess has disappeared; he also finds himself in the midst of a second planet-wide conflict, and again, mere moments after his arrival, his adopted country becomes involved. Immediately his patriotism—or should I say his 'chauvinism'?—comes to the fore, and deferring searching for his Princess to a later date, he again enlists and plunges into battle, fighting with the same fervor as before till a severe abdominal wound sidelines him and results in his being sent back to his adopted homeland. Recovering, he promptly begins searching for his Princess; but, ever mindful of his country's welfare, he simultaneously brings his telepathic powers into play and directs the development of a superweapon that enables the Good Guys to win hands down, but which after the war falls into the hands of one of their allies, who, it turns out, aren't Good Guys after all, but Bad Ones. . . Incidentally, I was a little confused as to where the title of this one derived: the original Bad Guys didn't claim to be gods."

"That's quite right," admitted *iii*. "But *The Gods of Earth* made much better copy than *The Supermen of Earth* would have, and since I write for a living I chose the former. But we're digressing: I believe the original subject was Thon Karther's motivation."

"Yes, of course. Well, on the final page of *The Gods of Earth*, Thon Karther still hasn't found his Princess, and we now go into *The Warlord of Earth*. Still a nonentity despite his heroic deeds on the fields of battle

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and still an unsung citizen despite his invention by proxy of the super-weapon, he continues searching for his Princess. At length, another war breaks out, a minor one, and again he takes up the Cause, giving the usual heroic account of himself. But this time, despite his valiant efforts, the Good Guys have to settle for a truce. Whilst keeping a telepathic eye on the military, he resumes searching for his Princess, combing every continent on the planet. To no avail. Now, still another minor war breaks out, a highly unpopular one, and once again Thon Karther enters the melee; but alas!—the Good Guys are stymied and again have to settle for a truce. He is now, to all intents and purposes—as your title suggests—in complete control of the military via his telepathic powers, and can, any time he deems his adopted country to be in dire peril, bring on a third global conflict. I must say, that for a man who professes to hate war, he has certainly developed a talent for waging them."

Faint red splotches had come into being on *iii's* rather pale cheeks. "But what better way could he serve his adopted countrymen than by becoming proficient in the art of war!" he demanded. "We're talking about planetary beings with war bred into their bones. There were hundreds of wars on Earth before Thon Karther even got there—thousands! I took great pains to build a believable background. It's all there in the first Earth Book in flashback form. The carnage, the pillage, the wanton destruction of whole cities, whole nations. *Delenda est Carthago.* . . ." *iii* wrung his hands. "How else could Thon Karther have aided his adopted country than by doing what he did? Than by finally taking telepathic control of its war machine? What better proof could there be of his noble motivation than his dedication and bravery on the field of battle, than his great and abiding love for his Princess?"

"Maybe none," I said. "But now, in the final pages of *The Warlord*, he appears to have turned *against* the Good Guys. Now, he's dabbling in politics and interfering with the judicial system—behind the scenes of course—and he's got everybody so screwed up morally, emotionally, intellectually and economically that they're no longer certain which horizon the sun's going to come up over the next day. Did he turn against his adopted countrymen because he finally found his Princess dancing in a Chippewa Street Go-Go Girl dive in Buffalo, New York, and wanted to get even?"

iii was still wringing his hands. His face, reflected in the window against the backdrop of red sward and contentedly grazing Capellan steers, was twisted with pain, a study in ultimate anguish. "I—I don't know," he said. "Thon Karther seems to have got out of hand. It was a mistake to make him an idealist—I can see that now. I'm almost afraid to begin Book IV. I—I thought maybe I could fix things if I let the younger generation take over, but now I don't know. Thon and the Princess had a son, you'll remember, and it was my idea to make *him* the hero. But every time I sit down to write, ghastly visions take shape in my mind. I—I see anarchy, chaos, famine, disaster. I see things *worse* than war. Please help me: I don't know what to do."

I stood up. The last thing in the world I'd wanted was to bring this literary giant to his knees, to see him cringe. Mumbling a series of half-incoherent apologies, I fled.

(cont. on page 72)

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LA FIN D'UNE MONDE (INTERIEURE)

[from: *The collected love poems of Adolf Hitler*]

JAMES SALLIS

James Sallis is one of those authors who had their beginnings in what, some ten years ago, was called The New Wave. That wave crested and broke in the late sixties but many of those associated with it have continued to develop and grow as writers, some—like Thomas Disch—already giants both within and outside our field. It's a pleasure to welcome Sallis to these pages with a story which must be read closely, so carefully has it been crafted.

THEY COME IN THE DARK and do terrible things to me. They go away.

In the morning there are bruises, memories. J traces them across my chest, down my arms. She asks no questions.

Their heads are like foxes. (I have seen, in the old books, pictures of foxes.) Their feet are hooves.

They leave prints of bloody paws on the door, the sheets.

I do not know what country I am in. I do not know the name of the language I speak, though I speak it, I am told, very well.

J does not speak the language.

J paints.

Her latest: Myself, dying. There is a smile on my lips.

It is the smile of a man who has achieved his life's ambition.

What I keep forgetting: I am here for a purpose. The expedition is well financed; they will expect results.

Results?—this journal? J's paintings? will not be enough. They expect nothing less than la petite cosmogonie du livre.

Books continue to come—I have no idea how they reach me; they appear in my room—for jacket blurbs, review, criticism.

Salvation, redeeming wisdom, gnosis—what do these poems search for?

I visited the grave today.

It rests in a tiny valley between two hills. Atop the hills are fig trees, down their sides, kudsu. There is a small plaque.

A woman was there before me.

She stood looking down at the grave.

There were so few women here (the number necessary has been carefully calculated), I was at first startled.

I could see from behind that her shoulders were wide, her waist narrow, her legs long and finely shaped, but my eyes—my eyes rested on her hair.

It was black.

Black hair is not allowed. My own had been bleached to a pale bluish white before I came here.

She wore a leiderhosen kind of

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thing, white, and nothing else. Below, exquisite black platform shoes, full advantage for her legs.

When she turned, I could see her breasts, but partly contained in the clothing, young and small, upturned. I thought of the snouts of tiny warm animals in the old books.

I came too late, she said.

On her face, a mask, a smile.

I tried to come earlier. But getting here— Why do they always leave me?

Or she, I thought, them.

The features of the mask changed perceptibly.

They always go away. They hide in universities, in the back rooms of libraries, they have families, they become editors, they forget me. And we once meant so much to one another, had so much between us.

I ask so little of them, she said. Love. Am I so difficult a woman to love?

The mask was now that of Greek comedy. Inappropriate affect, I thought, remembering words I'd read early in the project, in preparation *for* the project actually.

Look at me. I am beautiful, *spa?* I am responsive. All a man wants, I am. I give as I take, give more than I take, always more. I empty myself into them. They will not stay with me. My hands close on air, my legs clasp empty space.

The features shifted again. The mask was *blanc*.

Refuge, retreat, silence, they say those things to me. But silence is what I offer, the still center. The last

(She gestured to the grave.)

Spoke of killing me. He put his hands on my throat. Another time, a knife between my legs.

He was impotent, she said after a while; then added, Physically. I saw the world spinning about me. *Quel desordre!* Something I had never known. The walls of the room collapsed. I saw at the window the eye of a whale.

And I began then to see some of the things *he* saw. But I have no ego, you see, no real existence; I become who I am with. Abandoning myself to it, to chaos, I remained abandoned. I could not, even tentatively, without him, organise it, re-structure it. It, or myself. All substance, all raw material, and no form. It was overwhelming, it submerged me. Form, I needed him for that. It was what I asked in exchange for love. Is that so much to ask?

The comedy mask.

I am so old, so tired, she said. And later: I have been in an asylum. That is why I could not come.

Looking at my watch, I saw that no time had passed. The homogenous poetic instant.

I got out three years ago, it's taken me that long.

And so you came to, for me.

Features flared on the mask, then died.

You are—

I told her my name.

A long pause. I stared at the second hand of my watch, s'arreté.

You've changed, she said finally.

It has been a long time. Ten years.

And your work?

You must know there is no work.

The smile flashed into being again on the mask. Toi, ce creux. It was a smile that could drown a man, the swamp of order, the absolute semantics of beauty.

Then you'll do, she said.

I have a wife now, a painter.

That is not enough. You need me, you know that. You cannot go on without me.

I am beyond need, beyond desire,

(cont. on page 114)

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WARNING: THE SURGEON GENERAL HAS DETERMINED. . . :

Russell Bates tell us that the following story was written during the 1973 session of the Clarion Workshop in Seattle. His "Get With the Program!" appeared in the March, 1972, issue of our companion magazine, AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION. Bates has also appeared in F&SF, *the Lancer* Infinity *series, and has a pair of stories (still) forthcoming in* The Last Dangerous Visions.

RUSSELL BATES

KIRKLAND WATCHED from close by while technicians fussed over me with electronic patches and wraparound sensor fabric. I lay quietly on the cot, debating futilely with myself; it was too late to run or even walk out. The dirty little room was cold. Like a Fed rehab cell, I thought, if they catch us.

The technicians finished with me and walked out. Kirkland stepped closer, looking doubtful; his jowls shook as he bit nervously at his lower lip.

"I'm taking a real chance on you," he said, blinking. "Your test responses were all borderline. My equipment and my time are worth a lot of money." He sighed. "But, in a business like this . . ."

"Yeah," I said, trying to see him past the clips that were to monitor my eye movements. "In a business like this, you have to take whoever you can get."

"That's not true." He sounded hurt. "I have a whole string of special people who are very talented. Some of them are even artistic!"

The eye clips were giving me a headache. "Okay, okay. Save the bull for your customers. All I care about is the money."

Kirkland took a small metal case from his pocket. "I only pay for an acceptable product. Remember that." He ignored my glare. The case popped open at his touch and he gingerly lifted out a tiny capsule.

I opened my mouth. He slipped the capsule under my tongue. The drug's effects swam over me quickly. I felt warm; the air around me pressed like cotton on my skin. I was sliding gradually, quietly out of focus. Dimly, I heard Kirkland say, "This had better be good. . . ."

HARRIMAN WALTERS lay naked and shivering on a table in a chill green room. His lips moved but no words came. He stared dully at a multifaceted light fixture set in the ceiling. The bright light should have hurt his eyes. But pain somehow was missing. The brilliant white lamps were edged with red and green after-images, ap-

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pearing and disappearing in time to the jump movements of his eyes.

He blinked, then started to raise one arm. A tightly confining strap pinched his wrist. He felt another strap across his elbow. Walters tried to raise his head; the same tightness nearly cut off his breath.

Every part of his body that could be moved was restrained by straps. Walters was merely curious for a few moments. Then unease crept through him, followed by fear.

He tensed his arms and legs, tried to arch his back. But fighting the straps got him nowhere. Sweat ran over his body and made the table slippery beneath him. Walters shouted: garbled sound, choked and shrill.

A black-haired woman in a white dress suddenly was standing over him, blocking out the light. She squinted, angry. "Shush, now!"

She startled him so much that his reply was barely more than a whisper. "What?"

Just as suddenly, she moved away and the bright light shone again in his eyes. "No, wait! Come back! What's happening?" But the woman did not reappear. "Hey, goddammit!" He moved his head from side to side; blank green walls were all he could see. "Let me out of here! Let me go!" He thrashed futilely.

The woman stood over him again. He started to shout at her but she clamped a hand over his mouth. "Really, now! If you can't be quiet, I'll have to force you!"

Walters stared at her, breathing fast. Then he tried to move his mouth from under her hand. She pressed down harder. Walters bit her and she jerked her hand away.

"Oh, Mr. Walters!" The woman's face contorted in pain.

"Listen, you bitch! What the hell's going on? I . . ."

But she was gone again. Walters shouted and struggled.

A shadow fell across him: arms held high above him, hands bringing together a bottle of cloudy liquid and a glinting metal hypodermic syringe. The needle was plunged into the red rubber membrane. Walters cringed. The silver slide was pulled back. Walters shook his head. The level of liquid fell inside the bottle. Walters strained at the straps.

He tensed, shouted: "No! I haven't done anything! Please! I'll be quiet!"

"I warned you. You simply can't keep up this shouting."

"No! You don't have to! Just tell me where I am!"

Her arms moved down and he could see her face; her expression was calm and intent. Cold liquid was swabbed on his arm. She smiled, showing jumbled, ragged teeth. "Mr. Walters, hold still."

The point of the needle stung his skin. But she did not push down right away. Walters watched her helplessly. Her smile slowly relaxed and her eyebrows went up gradually. Then the needle broke the skin; an electric jab shook the flesh of his arm. She smiled again and the needle burned as it penetrated further.

Walters shouted again, moved against the straps, willed his strength. Something gave way under one wrist, followed by a loud snapping. He jerked and suddenly his arm was free. Surprise, then fear washed into the woman's expression.

Walters swung his arm up, smashed his forearm into the side of her jaw. She fell away in slow-motion out of his sight, her face drawn up in pain.

He struggled against the remaining straps, using his free hand. He freed

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his other arm, then one leg. With both hands, he broke the strap across his neck. He sat up, parting the strap around his waist.

The woman lay almost prone on the black tile floor, holding her face and crawling toward a door in the far wall. Walters tore free completely, slid off the table and stood up shakily. The hypodermic syringe lay near his feet. He grabbed it up and staggered after her.

She was almost to the door when he grabbed her by the hair and kicked her in the side.

"No, you don't!" he said, and he flung her on her back. She yelled and hit at him, scratching at his naked skin. Walters pinned her arms with his legs, sat down on her stomach, and smothered her screams with a sweating hand.

He looked into her eyes and raised the syringe over her face. He smiled. "Now, it's my turn."

Her eyes moved from side to side and she tried to shake her head. Walters lowered the needle. She squirmed, moved her jaw, bit at his palm. Her hands clawed at his bare legs. Her knees came up and slapped against his back.

Walters leaned forward a little. The needle was now close over her right eye. The woman shut her eyes tightly. Walters laughed, then drove the needle through her eyelid, his thumb depressing the plunger. Her body stiffened under him; her eyes flew open and her right eyelid tore almost in half. Blood sprayed across his hand, hit his chest.

The woman suddenly thrust Walters away from her. He tumbled back, shocked and afraid. She clutched at the syringe, then screamed. Vomit bubbled in her throat and choked off the piercing sound. Walters backed away to the wall and slid down to the floor. The woman half-raised herself from the floor, her arms and hands scrabbling in convulsed jerks. Then she shuddered, gurgled hideously, fell back and lay still.

Walters pressed himself against the wall, wondering if she would still get up somehow and come after him.

The door opened beside him and bumped his arm. He scrambled away from it. Someone said, "It's all right, Harry. You can come out now."

Walters slid further away. The door suddenly slammed shut and the lights went out. Walters screamed, threw himself toward the door. But he could not find it. He turned and crawled forward, groping for the woman's body. It was gone. The unseen, unseeable walls felt very close. He stood on his knees, waving in the dark to fend them off. He screamed again, then huddled himself into a shaking fetal mass and cried.

"NOT HALF BAD," Kirkland said, and he turned away from the teletape viewer to face me. "Care to see it?"

I stood in one corner of his office, as far away from the viewer as possible. "No. It's vivid enough just from memory." Then: "How much?"

He laughed and the fat around his middle rippled. "I think you're going to work out fine. I had my doubts, you know." He walked over to his huge desk, leaving deep footprints in the thick carpet. "But, with a little guidance . . ."

I moved closer. "How much?"

"Don't rush me, don't rush me." He sat down ponderously on the edge of his desk. "Not bad for a first effort," he said, nodding. "Of course, green was such an unimaginative choice of color. Sound was pretty good. And I never did get a clear impression of how old the woman was. She was just . . . woman." He

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grinned at me. "Was she your mother?"

I turned away. "Kirkland, you bastard! It's good and you know it! Your sickie customers will buy every copy you make!" I turned back, hands in pockets. "How the hell *much*?"

He waved a hand in a small, slow circle. "Okay. Say twelve hundred now, and four per cent when the first sales figures are in." Then he pointed at me. "That's tops for a beginner in this business. Any of my competitors would steal you blind. So, I'll want exclusive option on whatever else you can come up with."

"Agreed." I glanced at the floor, and sighed. Kirkland snorted and I glared at him.

He reached for his intercom, pressed a key, and said, "Helen, draw up the usual paper for my friend here, then get him twelve hundred cash." To me, he said, "My so-called sickie customers are just ordinary folks who hunger for a taste of vicarious violence once in a while. Please think a little more kindly of them. It's not their fault the government launders their teevee and books and movies so Simon-pure." He smiled. "They buy, I supply."

I started for the door, then stopped. "How kindly would you feel toward them if I put you in one of my scenarios?"

He didn't blink once. "Make it good, don't use any names, and I might buy."

"Screw you. That's my own personal property."

He shrugged. "My loss is your loss. See you soon, I hope?"

I stared at him. Softly: "Yeah, dammit."

Kirkland chuckled and walked back to the viewer.

I could still hear him chuckling even after I shut the door behind me. His secretary indicated a chair and I sat down to wait for my money. Sounds were still muffled to me; the drug's effects had not yet quite worn off.

I smiled.

GREGORY KIRKLAND broke surface spluttering, and was instantly swept away by dark, swirling currents in the underground river. His arms flailed and he clawed at ragged walls of stone, losing gobbets of flesh from his fingers. He yelled. Far ahead but coming closer was the hissing road of water flashing into steam. . . .

—RUSSELL BATES

Earth Books (cont. from 64)

WHEN I got back to Earth, my Muse was sound asleep in the spare bedroom. I stood in the doorway, gazing fondly at her golden hair spread out on the pillow, at her mischievous elfin face. I do a lot of bitching about the *status quo*, like everybody else I know, but deep down inside me I like this planet I live on, this lovely Earth where I was born. This land of promises and sweet fulfillments, this paradise that has never had to harken to the thunder of a warlord's tread. Thank you, gentle gods and goddess, wherever you may be, for making this Earth real and consigning *iii's* to the realm of make-believe.

I looked once more at my sleeping Muse. Then, gently, I closed the door and locked it. If she wishes to leave me, I know a locked door will not stop her; but if she sees it is locked she will know how much I want her to stay; and knowing this, perhaps she will remain.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG

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(cont. from page 14)

Pinafore brig. Then the Fleet. Now the Fleet again. Three times incarcerated since buying the blasted umbrella. Before then, never a serious brush with the law. (He didn't count the abortive undergraduate party. At 8 p.m., no one had shown, so he glumly went out to get himself a steak sandwich. When he got back, the place was teeming with uninvited guests and a coterie of irate campus cops who, fortunately, had no idea who the host was.)

He huddled in a corner for warmth but did his best to avoid bodily contact with the lice-ridden sot next to him. In a far corner, a man with a broken nose and a piercing stare watched Fillmore every second of the time.

At least, they'd let him keep the umbrella for the time being. After the trial, the authorities might well confiscate his property and then the scholar would be stuck here for good.

Stuck where? It was obviously Dickensian London, but it took Fillmore quite a few hours to figure out the weirdly-altered names of Holmes and Watson. When the answer came, it naturally disturbed him, but at least he began dimly to perceive the principle of universal economy.

Sherrinford Holmes. Ormond Sacker. These were names Arthur Conan Doyle toyed with before settling on "Sherlock" and "John H. Watson." Fillmore had landed himself smack in the middle of an incomplete *draft* of *A Study in Scarlet*. An *incomplete* draft. After all, what had Sacker said Holmes was busy doing? Investigating the Edwin Drood mystery—a notoriously unfinished masterpiece. . . .

"That damned Ruth," the scholar muttered, clutching his umbrella close and trying to ignore the fixed gaze of the man with the broken nose. "Must have been trying to bring charges against me for breach-of-promise."

Nothing else made sense. It was apparent he'd inherited the "sequence" from the earlier cosmos, because he was in The Fleet awaiting such a trial. Mrs. Bardell, though astonishingly similar in face and form to Ruth, was really Sacker-and-Holmes' landlady . . . the very same Mrs. Bardell who sued Mr. Samuel Pickwick and landed him in prison in *The Pickwick Papers*.

"Well, at least the old boy did me a favor, and now, it appears I'm doing him one, whether he ever learns it or no." It worried the scholar. The outrageously comic trial of Bardell Vs. Pickwick is the dramatic focal point of that Dickens tome. But some bounder that resembled Fillmore apparently once jilted Mrs. B-, and as a result, the hapless alien seemed to be usurping the breach-of-promise trial that ought to—

"There I go again!" Fillmore grumbled to himself. "Confusing fictional events with what takes place in these strange places I end up in. Do they follow the stories I read on 'normal earth?' Do they branch off wherever they wish? Maybe this is just an earlier trial and Pickwick's is yet to come here. *Or* maybe this is also a *draft* stage of the Pickwick Papers Ms. Then how do I—?"

He could not even finish the thought. It was too complicated. As hard to define as the identical looks of Mrs. Bardell and Ruth. Perhaps, he pondered, the entire cosmic system is a network of interlinking puzzle boxes, one heartwall economically doubling, tripling in alternative dimensions, and each soul, in sleep, shares identities across the gaps of space and relative times.

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"Bah," he murmured. "Einstein notwithstanding. Time is a concurrency."

But his philosophic gum-chewing was disturbed by a sharp poke in the ribs. It was the shifty-eyed ferret seated by him in the corner of the cell. "'Ere now," he whispered to Fillmore, "that's a peculiar thing ye've got there. Where'd ye fetch it?"

Fillmore tried to ignore him, but the ferret exchanged the poke for a pinch. "Ow!" the scholar yelped. "Stop that!"

"I asked ye a question," the ferret whispered. "And keep yer voice low, if ye value living!"

The scholar faced his tormentor squarely, an angry retort on his lips, but the impulse stopped when he beheld the other's expression. The ferret's face was strained, each muscle tensed to the stretching-point. His eyes rolled independent of the fixed head, and they moved in the direction of the sinister individual on the other side of the cell. The man with the broken nose.

Fillmore did not look at him. He regarded the ferret anxiously, and replied as quietly as his questioner.

"I bought my umbrella far from here. What matter is it?"

"'im. Don't ye see how he stares at it. I never saw one to covet something so much. Never takes 'is eyes off it."

"I thought he was staring at me."

The ferret shook his head. "Last night, when ye slumbered, 'e crept near to examine it. Mutterin' to 'isself. Thought he'd snatch it then." The ferret shrugged. "But then, where'd 'e go with it?" The beady eyes narrowed, glinting with an eager urgency. "Ye want advice, man? If he asks for it, don't argue. Sell it, or make it a gift. Don't cross 'im!"

Fillmore shook his head. "Impossible. I *can't* part with my umbrella!"

"I tell ye, man, 'e's half-mad! Don't cross 'im! They'll 'ave 'im out in a day or two and then 'e'll wait for ye, and 'e'll 'ave 'is cane."

What in all good hell is he babbling about? Fillmore wondered. The man has no cane. In fact, he walks perfectly well. Look at him—

The man with the broken nose was standing. He turned his gaze briefly on the little ferret and that person shrank away from Fillmore and cowered in a corner of the cell.

What kind of a crazy sequence is this, anyway? If this is the Bardell trial, why should I worry about strange men with umbrella fixations? Even if he is dangerous, and even if he gets out of prison and tries to wait for me, my trial will keep me here indefinitely. And then? Damn, I may *never* escape!

"Permit me to introduce myself." The tall, sinister man proferred his card.

Fillmore stood. He was startled at the meek civility of the other's mien. From a distance, he appeared *so* menacing. But now, he must rectify his mistake. A toff, doubtless, confined for some minor infraction of the peace. He was well dressed, dark suit, ruffled shirt, a thin tie which might have passed muster a century later on campus.

The card told him nothing. It bore nothing but a name, "A. I. Persano."

"I trust my reputation is not unknown to you?" he asked. His face was smiling in a way that might suggest a double-meaning to the question. But Fillmore knew no one intimately in this peculiar world of confused beginnings, so he could certainly not identify the stranger by reputation.

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"I have been admiring that odd instrument which you have over your arm," Persano remarked. "May I examine it more closely?"

Fillmore found it hard to deny the reasonable request, so mildly was it made, and yet, something warned him to refuse. From the corner of his eye, he saw the ferret urgently motioningly him to comply. With considerable reluctance, the scholar relinquished the instrument.

The tall man minutely inspected the umbrella, turning it this way and that, pausing to push back the cloth folds and read the partially-obliterated inscription on the handle. As he did, Fillmore studied the lean, hard face. The eyes never blinked. The mouth was set in a half-grin that could easily be assessed as cruel. The nose, too, at close scrutiny, was even more disturbing than it first appeared. It was not broken after all. Rather it had been *sliced*, as if by some sharp edge. A deep lateral furrow creased the bridge, so that it resembled an ill-set fracture. But Persano was not the kind to indulge in violent roughhouse, Fillmore was sure. He was too contained, too deceptively calm. He might deal in rapier, never in bludgeon.

Persano returned the umbrella without comment. Then, apparently satisfied, he asked what Fillmore was doing in jail. The scholar outlined the details of his case, and the other clucked in doleful sympathy.

"Who defends you?" the tall man asked.

"Myself."

"And who represents the Bardell interests?"

Fillmore shuddered. He knew who Marta Bardell's barristers *must* be. "Messrs. Dodson and Fogg, I do presume."

"What? Then you're a fool, man. You have no choice but to raise capital sufficient to fee attorneys as crooked as those pettifoggers!"

"I haven't the money," Filmore demurred. He refused to petition Pickwick. That might be an action which would mire him in the mishmosh-world he'd stumbled into. The best course was to maintain a detached air from the circumstances afflicting him . . .

"Since you are destitute," Persano said, smiling, "I have a suggestion."

Silence.

Fillmore knew what the other was about to say.

"Sell me your umbrella. I will pay handsomely for it."

"Why?"

"It . . . amuses me."

Fillmore shook his head. To his relief, the other did not press his request.

Persano merely smiled more broadly. "Very well," he murmured. "There are other ways."

The following day, A. I. Persano was released from prison.

TWO DAYS LATER, a warder unlocked the door of the cell.

"Fillmore." He jerked his thumb to the door. "Out."

"Is it time for my trial?"

The warder shook his head. "Won't be one. Ye're free."

"*Free?*"

The ferret clucked in warning. "I told ye."

"How *can* I be free?" the scholar demanded, amazed, puzzled, overjoyed—and simultaneously uneasy.

"Plaintiff's counsel dropped charges. No estate worth speaking of to cover the expense."

"Estate? What are you talking

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about?"

The warder drew one finger across his throat in a gesture as meaningful in one world as another. "Bardell," he said. "Last night. Someone cut 'er throat."

Chapter Four

FOR ONCE, he was not anxious to get out of prison. He dragged his footstps along the last corridor before the outside gate and cudgelled his brains to make out what sort of dreadful sequence he'd landed in.

It *could* be the grimmer side of Dickens, he thought. Perhaps the only way to terminate one's existence here is to die. He shuddered.

At the front gate, he entreated the constable accompanying him to protect him, but the other merely grunted, "Oh, ye'll be noted, right enough," then turned and left Fillmore to the mercy of the streets.

What did he mean by that? the scholar wondered. Then, with a shock of dismay, he realized that he must be considered gravely suspect in the eyes of the police. "Bah!" he snapped, loud enough to be heard. "If I couldn't hire an attorney, what makes them think I could afford an assassin to murder Mrs. Bardell?"

He peered about nervously, but there was no trace of the sinister Persano anywhere. It was early, but the sickly pall of London mist obscured the sun. Few footpassengers traversed the section of thoroughfares near The Fleet.

Fillmore walked aimlessly for a time, trying to work out the problem of the cosmic block of action he was expected to participate in. Since the breach-of-promise trial had come to naught, he could only presume that the uncompleted sequence with Ruth in G&S-land had finally run its course. But a new situation appears to have taken up, the scholar mused, worriedly. A dreadful situation, very like.

He was just crossing Bentinck Street at the corner of Oxford when he heard a sudden clatter of hooves and the rumble of a large vehicle. He swerved in his tracks and paled. A two-horse van, apparently parked at a nearby curb, was in furious motion, bearing directly down on him. Fillmore uttered a lusty yell and leaped a good six or seven feet onto the curb. Without stopping, he ducked down behind a lamp-post and did not rise until the carriage rolled into the distance and was lost to sight and sound.

He rose, puffing mightily. The jump was the heartiest exercise he'd undergone since trying to run away from Katisha weeks earlier. His heart pounded against his rib-cage. Fillmore glanced right and left, but the few pedestrians in view went about their business, oblivious to the near-accident which had just occurred.

But was it an accident?

He continued his journey, but did not allow himself the luxury of abstracted thought. Instead, Fillmore looked right and left, backwards and forwards, fearful of another attack. And yet the street seemed deserted. He was practically the only foot-passenger traversing the avenue.

His very solitariness made him even more anxious. He was an easy target for anyone who might be following just beyond the curtain of the fog. At the next corner, he looked down the cross street and decided to take it, in hopes of coming to a more populous quarter of town.

There was a constable in the middle of the block. Fillmore breathed a

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sigh of relief. At least he was safe for a few steps . . .

The constable turned and regarded him. The man's face turned ash-white. He stuck his whistle to his lips and blasted it, at the same time thrusting an arm directly at the professor. Fillmore, astonished, hopped back a step, and wondered whether he ought to run.

At the same instant, a huge brick smashed with tremendous impact upon the pavement directly in front of him. One more step and the brick would have crushed his skull.

Fillmore and the officer regarded each other for a second or two, too relieved to speak. Then Fillmore stepped far out into the street—looking carefully both ways—and walked over to the other, thanking him with great earnestness.

"I pride myself," said the constable, "on a quick reaction time. Fortunate for you, right enough."

"Yes . . . but who dropped that deuced brick?" Fillmore squawked.

The other's eyes widened. "Never occurred to me it wasn't an accident! Come, then! Better be brisk!"

Without another word, the constable dashed into the doorway of the large, cold tenement house from which the missile had apparently been impelled. Fillmore accompanied him, preferring to be in the company of the law at that moment than to be left waiting defenseless in the street.

They climbed dark, interminable stairs, redolent of cabbage and other less tolerable reeks. At length they found the skylight, which was reachable only by means of an iron ladder stapled with great brackets against the wall. It was a sheer vertical climb and Fillmore did not relish it.

At last they stood upon the roof, a good four or five stories above the street (Fillmore had lost count of how many flights they'd taken in the ascent). There was a large chimney-stack off to one side, and the remnants of a clothesline, evidently blown down by a gust of wind. By the street edge of th roof lay a pile of shingles, slate and brick, the flotsam of some antique building venture.

"There's your accident," the officer said, jerking his head towards the pile of construction leavings. "Wind must've worked one loose. Bit of a hazard, I'd best move 'em."

Fillmore, after thanking the policeman once more, left him laboring on the roof. He doubted it was an accident, and if it was not, then he was in danger from the assailant who must still be in the neighborhood. He wanted to cling to the protection of the law, but his conscience would not permit him to endanger the officer who saved his life—and proximity to J. Adrian (what a beastly name!) Fillmore might do just that.

On the stairwell, he tried the catch of the umbrella, but it would not open. The sequence was far from finished.

Just as he was turning the corner of the last landing leading to the street level and the doorway out, he thought he heard a slight noise below, in the corner of the corridor leading alongside the first approach of the stairwell. He peered down the side of the bannister but it was dark and he could see nothing.

He paused, unsure of what to do, whether to go back or forward. To rejoin the policeman would only prolong the danger. With a sudden burst of nerve, Fillmore leaped the railing and, umbrella pointed downward, dropped to the floor below.

A thud and a moan. A burly body broke his fall. He lugged the lurker

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into the moted dustlight and saw a feral visage, rich in scars and whiskers. A life-preserver—the British equivalent of a blackjack—was still clutched in the assailant's hand, but the man was unconscious.

Fillmore slumped against the wall, almost nauseous with fear. In the past half-hour, his life had been attempted three times, and, what may have been worse, he'd met the dangers with expedition and a physical courage all unsuspected in his makeup. It worried him as much as the danger.

Maybe *that's* what's got me stuck in this damned place! Fillmore shook his head to clear it of the vertigo that the fall brought about. No time for cosmic trepidations. Probably more danger, any moment, any second . . .

He quickly turned out the pockets of the man on the floor, but found nothing incriminating or enlightening. The life-preserver he stuck into his own back-pocket.

Slowly, fearfully, Fillmore cracked open the front door. The street was no longer sparse of population. A knot of people milled about the middle of the street, shouting, giving unobeyed orders; one person was busily engaged in retching on the sidewalk.

The professor hurried down the front steps and peered through the press of people. There was a body smeared along the street, a bloody rag of flesh and dislocated bone.

It was the policeman. Someone must have shoved him from the roof, Fillmore realized, horrified.

"The chimney! The bastard must have been behind it!"

Angry for the first time since the game of stalk-and-attack started, Fillmore wanted to punish the killer who destroyed a man who'd saved his own life. He trotted to the middle of the street, shielding his eyes from the glare of hidden sun shining through blanched clouds. Was there someone still on the roof? Could he take him, too, like the thug in the stairwell?

For answer, a fierce face suddenly appeared at the edge of the building-top. An odd weapon quickly swiveled into position and pointed straight at the scholar.

He ran zigzag, hoping to evade the inevitable shot. But the other was a crack marksman. Even with the difficulty of hitting a moving target, the villain managed to lodge one shot in Fillmore's shoulder.

The professor staggered. What did that character say in the Fredric Brown novel? "If you are killed here, you will be dead . . . in every world." Fillmore stumbled to his feet. The strange weapon—which made no noise—was already in position for another shot.

My God! It's an air rifle!

The horrible universe suddenly fell into place. Terror overcame Fillmore and gave him the strength of mad desperation. He shot out across the street, waving the umbrella in huge, confusing arcs, changing direction every few seconds. He headed for the juncture of streets again, and as he did, shouted and screamed for help. Some of the denizens of the neighborhood huddled about the constable's body stared at the crazy fellow and decided instantly that it was he who must have murdered the officer. No one advanced to Fillmore's aid.

Oddly enough, there was no second bullet. Fillmore reached the intersection safely. He saw a Hansom slowly rumbling down the middle of the avenue. "I must look a fearful sight," he thought, "shoulder bleeding, weird umbrella waving about like a Floradora girl's prop . . ."

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Fillmore took no chances. He ran straight into the path of the Hansom, shouting for it to stop. At the last instant, remembering the dreadful attempt of the two-horse van to run him down, he experienced an awful qualm. But the cab pulled to a stop.

"Baker Street," Fillmore gasped, jumping in and slamming the door. "Number 221."

The cab rattled off slowly. The scholar gasped for sufficient breath, then pounded the sides and shouted for the driver to make haste, but to no avail. The Hansom lumbered sluggishly along, neither creeping nor hurrying. Fillmore stuck his head out of the window and surveyed the street behind. There were no vehicles in pursuit.

He leaned back against the wall of the cab and panted. "Safe for a time, at least," he murmured. "I just hope that Sherrinford—"

Before he could even complete the thought, the cab lurched to a stop. Fillmore stuck his head out the window. "Here, what is this? This isn't Baker Street!"

"No, sir," the cabbie said, dismounting. He walked to Fillmore's door and stood by it, preventing it from opening. "Taking on another passenger, we are, sir."

Fillmore regarded him blankly. Then he swung around in his seat, hoping to get out the other way. But that door was already opening.

The new passenger rested his cane against the seat and closed the door behind himself. He settled comfortably into the place opposite Fillmore.

"You've caused us a deal of trouble this morning," A. I. Persano remarked mildly.

Chapter Five

THE CABBIE whipped the horse to a froth. The Hansom rattled along at breakneck speed. Fillmore braced himself to keep from bouncing straight through the flimsy ceiling. He gritted his teeth at the ache in his shoulder.

Persano, riding as skilfully as if mounted on a thoroughbred, was quite amiable. He regarded the other's persecution as a tiresome necessity, to be managed with swift expedition, but utterly without malice. *Not* to be discussed in polite company. The Code, by all means!

"Had you been reasonable," he stated mildly, "all this pother might have been eclipsed."

"Meaning I should have given you the umbrella?"

Persano gravely inclined his head.

"Rubbish!" Fillmore said with great asperity. "You are in a frenzy to get this instrument. Therefore, you must know its function. It follows, then, that you know I couldn't part with it at any price."

Persano clucked disapprovingly. "I could tell the authorities that the umbrella was stolen from my employer."

"You are blathering nonsense! Anyone with a shred of sense must deduce your employer has no desire to see this instrument's astonishing properties made public. You could have reported it stolen in prison. Instead, two people are dead because of it, and I have a bullet in my shoulder."

"An unfortunately staged episode," Persano agreed, stifling a yawn. "The Colonel has no idea of how to achieve maximum effect with minimal effort. His agrgression grows in inverse proportion to his waning manhood."

Suddenly, the puzzle, nearly solv-

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ed, all clicked into place. The ferocious Colonel Sebastian Moran! ("The second most dangerous man in London, Watson!") And the kindly sorcerer, John Wellington Wells, admitted to spying on *a master mathematician*, from whom he stole the umbrella. The instrument must be the brainchild of the brilliantly evil kingpin of London crime, Professor Moriarty! And then, another thought: Holmes once spoke of two especially dangerous members of the Moriarty gang. One was Moran. Persano must be the other.

Fillmore, shuddering, commented on Persano's remark. "You are, of course, referring to Colonel Moran."

For a split-second, the mask of indifference dropped, and the other subjected Fillmore to a deadly scrutiny. Then his eyes clouded over again and Persano propped his cane by his chin and chuckled.

"Cards on the table, eh?" He nodded approvingly. "Very well, then, an end to games-playing: you, sir, are either an agent or a fool."

"What do you mean?" Fillmore stanched the wound in his throbbing shoulder with a handkerchief.

"It cannot be that you are with the Yard," Persano mused. "A *provocateur* would not allow a fellow-constable to blindly face an unseen foe without ample warning. Nor, for that matter, would Sherrinford Holmes stick someone else's neck on the chopping-block. No. You did not lure me into an imminent trap. You are engaged in a lone game against the greatest organization of its type in the world. You are, therefore, a colossal fool."

"In a word, you refer to Professor Moriarty's organization."

"*Who?*" Persano asked, pretending perplexity.

There was a lengthy silence.

"I do *not* know to whom you refer," Persano said, "but I might amend what I said before. I called you a fool. I suspect you are worse: a veritable lunatic. But the tense soon shall alter . . ."

Fillmore clutched the umbrella tight, his thoughts racing. His life was in great danger. In whichever world he blundered, he ended up a victim. In this clime, he might well end his sequence *permanently*.

"This needs no further discussion, I think," Fillmore said airily, attempting an ease of manner which he hoped might match his opponent's. He shifted in the uncomfortable carriage seat. "You will steal the umbrella and there's an end of it."

Persano shook his head, an earnest expression on his face. "Really that is not possible. Don't you see? You, an independent agent, are somehow privy to details that my employer would not like bruited about. You are able to set my face and name to several recent incidents of dubious merit. You carry a pellet in you from an air-gun and there are many unsolved crimes connected with such a weapon. What is worse, you know the Colonel's last name. No, no, it's quite impossible, surely you see my position?"

His eyebrows raised quizzically. He really seemed concerned lest Fillmore fail to comprehend and sanction the deplorable step that must be taken.

It did not fool Fillmore. Persano had never taken pains to cover his involvement in the "incidents." What was worse, he freely volunteered information about Moran's association with other atrocities. Persano evidently never at all intended to let the scholar survive.

"Look," he blurted, "I have a dif-

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ferent suggestion. Come with me someplace else so that I am no longer in this world. I'll go back to my own cosmos! Then you can take the damned umbrella and return here!"

Persano shook his head again. "I can't do that. How do I know how long it will take before that thing decides to work again? If it could work now, you wouldn't be here at this moment. But even if you could waft us elsewhere immediately, you know I could not use the umbrella for long afterwards, and I have no time to wait."

"Why couldn't you use it?" Fillmore asked.

Persano eyes him curiously. "I think you actually don't know."

"Know *what?*" His shoulder still hurt. The carriage had decelerated to a more bearable rate, but he still was unable to sit comfortably.

Persano reached over and took the umbrella. Fillmore tried to hold tight, but the other easily plucked it from his grasp. Persano pushed aside the hood-folds and put his thumb on the catch.

"Observe." He pushed the button.

Nothing happened.

"It is imprinted with your brain-pattern. It will take it a long time to readjust. Unless . . ."

He let the thought dangle in the air, drumming his fingertips on the central pole of the bumbershoot.

A long while passed. They stared at one another without speaking.

Then the horse slowed to a walk.

"We are almost there," Persano said in a low voice.

"Where?"

"A warehouse. Prepare to disembark."

Persano looked out the window. As he did, Fillmore suddenly realized why he was having so much trouble sitting comfortably. There was something in his back-pocket—

The life-preserver!

Carefully, carefully, he reached his hand around to get the sapping tool. His fingers crept. Persano stared out the window.

Good! Teeth clenched, a cold perspiration bespangling his brow, the pedant strained for the ersatz blackjack. *Another quarter-inch . . .*

It snagged in a fold of his pocket, and he could not yank it free. Fillmore tugged, but his arm was in an awkward position and he hadn't ample leverage to twist out the thing cleanly.

The carriage shuddered to a stop.

"End of the line," Persano announced, turning. His eyes narrowed. "What *are* you doing?" he asked, his tone suggesting the indulgent displeasure of a kindly schoolteacher towards a wayward urchin.

Fillmore frantically pulled at the cosh. The whole back-pocket of his pants ripped off. At last, he had it in his hand!

But the quick movement triggered Persano. Swiftly, soundlessly, he shot forward and clutched Fillmore's throat in a steel grip. He was not angry, only methodical. Whatever Fillmore was trying to do, Persano immediately recognized it as a last-ditch effort and knew he must bring it to nought. Though the business was clearly beneath him—throttling was the preserve of brutal underlings—he squeezed Fillmore's windpipe quite efficiently, nontheless.

The scholar once read that it only takes a professional killer seven seconds to choke someone to death. Already the lights of life danced dimly and dwindled. He knew he only had strength in his arm for a single assault—

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He cracked the preserver against the base of Persano's neck. (Gesture derived from countless spy and war films.) Persano slumped for a second, only a second; the quick mind analyzed the extent of danger with incredible celerity and marshaled strength for a new attack.

But Fillmore only needed the one respite. He heaved Persano off and simultaneously raked one hand upwards over the other's face from jaw to nose (a trick out of *Shane*) while the other hand slammed the life-preserver into the throat thus presented for the blow (*Bad Day at Black Rock*).

Persano gagged and doubled up.

Dropping the cosh, Fillmore wrest free the umbrella and jumped out the opposite side of the carriage from whence he'd entered. Just then, the driver pulled the other door open; seeing he was gone, he cursed at Fillmore, slammed the door and started after him. Fillmore threw his weight against the Hansom, hoping to tip it over onto the driver, but the effort drew fresh pain from his shoulder-wound and only earned him a good jarring butt.

He saw the feet of the driver rounding the carriage, so he started the other way. An idea struck him and he vaulted onto the driver's seat ("Thanks to Gene Autry!") and slapped the reins.

The horse ambled forward two inches and stopped.

"Damn! It always looks so *easy*!"

The driver came up on him. A sinewy, saturnine thug he was with a dagger in his hand. He hauled himself onto the seat, slashing at Filmore, but the professor administered a stunning blow to the chest with the whip-handle ("courtesy Lash LaRue") and the rascal landed on his back in the street, roaring.

The horse, mistaking the bellow for an order, reared up.

"*Whoa!*" Fillmore yelled. The animal, unfamiliar with the western idiom, interpreted the word as a seconding motion and immediately adopted the measure by dashing forth. The cab careened to one side, righted itself and lurched behind the crazed beast.

The jolt pitched Fillmore backwards. He nearly lost his grip on the umbrella, but clutched frantically, regained his hold, and simultaneously squirmed onto his face so he could embrace the cab-roof with arms spread wide.

The horse stormed down the cobbled thoroughfare, which was a road that directly paralleled the river. Warehouses sped past; a confusion of disappearing drydocks. Cursing dockwallopers sprang out of the path of the runaway.

Fillmore hugged the roof, too winded and frightened to move. But suddenly, the blade of a sword swiftly emerged from the roof one-sixteenth of an inch in front of his nose. He decided to budge after all.

While the blade was withdrawing for another thrust, he scrambled into the driver's seat and fished for the reins. No use; they hung over the lip and jounced in the roadbed; he strained but could not reach them. Next thing he knew, the furious pitch of the ride bumped his teeth together so he bit his tongue and shoved him straight back against the cab housing. He instantly pushed forward, narrowly avoiding the sword-point which emerged at the place where his body had made impact.

He ran his hand down the umbrella and tried to snap it open. *No go!* Then he saw a new danger up ahead.

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About two blocks in the distance, the street curved sharply; where it turned, the embankment terminated and there was a sheer unprotected drop into the river.

Two thoughts, born of desperation and an acquaintanceship with Hopalong Cassidy and screen versions of The Three Musketeers, popped into his head. He peered ahead—*yes!* Just before the turn there was a custom-house with empty flagpole jutting from the second-story . . .

He sprang forward onto the traces and grabbed the link-pin with the handle of the umbrella. Fillmore seized the shaft of the bumbershoot and hauled up until the pin was almost free. He stood up, balancing wobbily, squinting to gauge the correct angle and distance, waiting for the vital precise second.

"Now!"

Jumping as high as he could, he latched onto the flagpole with one hand, at the same time tugging on the umbrella so the link-pin disengaged. The carriage-top smartly smacked his ankle and, with a tremendous effort, Fillmore hooked the umbrella over his other arm and got a second purchase on the pole with his left hand. The carriage rumbled past beneath him. A bolt of pain struck his shoulder, but he endured it, watching with grim approval the event happening in the street below.

The cab lost speed and the steed, no longer shackled to it, pulled on ahead. It negotiated the bend, but the carriage lumbered straight to the edge, teetered for a fraction of a second, then plummeted into the icy Thames with a colossal splash.

"And that," Fillmore observed with satisfaction "is the last anyone will see of Mr. A. I. Persano!"

His pleasure was short-lived. Now that the immediate danger was over, it occurred to him that he hadn't the foggiest idea of how to get down from the flagpole without breaking his neck. But it didn't take him long to devise a course of action.

"*Help!*" Fillmore shouted. "*Get me the hell off of here!*"

Chapter Six

SACKER SHOOK HIS HEAD incredulously. "That is the strangest story I have ever heard, sir. Either you are up to something nefarious, or you are mad."

"I tell you that I am not lying!" Fillmore protested. "Would I mention Professor Moriarty if I were part of his gang?"

The argument had been going on for several minutes, and the professor was beginning to despair of ever convincing the good doctor that he was anything but a raving lunatic. Had it not been for his shoulder wound, Sacker probably would not have permitted him entry into Sherrinford Holmes' flat, half convinced as he was that Fillmore was indirectly responsible for Mrs. Bardell's murder.

The doctor shook his head slowly. "You come to me with wild tales about dimensional transfers—whatever that means—and worlds where I only exist in an unpublished manuscript and Holmes is not Holmes! The least marvelous portion of your romance is that which you claim happened this morning: runaway Hansoms, customs-clerks hauling you off flagpoles, brickbats and dead policeman! Surely, sir, you do not find it marvelous that I have some difficulty swallowing all this?"

Fillmore nodded wearily. It had been a most exhausting day, and his bandaged shoulder still throbbed

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dully. The night was drawing on and he wanted nothing more dramatic than sleep. But duty was duty, in whatever world he inhabited. If the Moriarty gang were so bent on attaining the umbrella, it could only follow that the infamous professor had some awful scheme in mind.

But Sacker was adamant. "Holmes only mentioned this pedagoge of yours once, and that recently. Whatever he did, I do not know. For Holmes only alluded to him on that one occasion at the time of his disappearance."

"*His disappearnce?!*"

Sacker nodded. "Yes. I *do* recall Holmes' relief. *And* his perplexity. One day, he said, Moriarty was in London, the next he was nowhere on the face of the earth. 'And good riddance, Sacker!' he remarked, and there was an end of the conversation. I never heard Moriarty's name again until you brought it up tonight."

"Well, well," Fillmore said impatiently, "whatever may be the status of the professor, he has a strong and wicked organization which still carries on his works. It must be quashed. And since its lieutenants know about my umbrella, it is imperative that I speak to Sherrinford Holmes immediately!"

"Well, as for that," Sacker suggested, "I suppose you could come along with me tonight. Holmes has communicated from Cloisterham, where that business is all but wrapped up. He needs some final service pertaining to one Mr. Sapsea, and I am to perform it." Sacker chuckled. "Holmes rarely asks me to tackle anything histrionic. It must be a goose, indeed, to whom I must play the poker!"

Fillmore's brows knit. It sounded familiar . . . ah, yes, the "Sapsea" fragment found in Dickens' study after his death, an enigmatic portion of the *Edwin Drood* manuscript that remained unpublished for many years. The rough-draft aspect of the present world still held. It occurred to the scholar that in a place comprised of unfinished or half-polished literary concepts, it might not be *possible* to complete a sequence and get free. He nervously tapped his fingers against the curved grip of the umbrella and tried to follow the thought, but Sacker spoke again.

"I must ask you not to interfere with the progress of the case, or attempt to communicate with Holmes until he gives me leave to bring you forward. If you can agree to that, then you may accompany me on the 10:40 out of Charing Cross."

"Very well," Fillmore replied reluctantly. "But perhaps I might be able to give you a note to pass on to Holmes when we arrive. Time *may* be of the essence!"

The doctor nodded. "And now, since we can do nothing until it is time to entrain, I suggest we follow my friend's habit of tabling all talk of hypothetical crises until we have detabled. I will send round for an amiable Bordeaux and ask Mrs. Raddle, our new landlady, to set out supper. Does that seem agreeable?"

"Oh, of course," Fillmore concurred, dimly wondering where he'd heard of Mrs. Raddle before. "I take it you have decided not to regard me as an imminent threat."

"Well, sir," Sacker chuckled, "I must admit that is an odd angle for a man to shoot himself as a piece of corroborative evidence. I still cannot accept the wild history you related, but if you are mad, sir, at least it is an engaging malady. Besides, I detect a man of learning in you, and a schol-

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ar is by no means the worst of dinner companions."

Fillmore thanked the doctor for his courtesy and mentally noted that Sacker/Watson certainly matched the old Holmesian observation (was it first made by Christopher Morley?) that a man might be honored to meet the Great Detective, but it would be Watson with whom a wintery evening, a cold supper and brandy would be most enjoyed.

While the good physician stepped downstairs to talk to Mrs. Raddle (she's in *Pickwick Papers*, too, isn't she?), Fillmore busied himself looking about the drawingroom/library. It was easy to tell which portion of the bookshelves belonged to Holmes and which to Sacker. One half, or better, was cramful of standard references and albums of clippings of criminous activity. The other side of the room was devoted to a broad assortment of escape literature—tales of early English battles, ghost stories, high romance on the seas, an occasional sampler of sentimental poetry and (perhaps in deference to Holmes' profession) a tattered copy of the lurid *Newgate Calendar*, a volume destined for ignominy in another world.

Sacker had one book open on a table by his easy-chair and the professor walked over to inspect what it was. "Ah! A man of similar tastes in fantasy," he murmured. "Benson's *The Room in the Tower* and other ghastly tales." He turned the book around and flipped through it, holding Sacker's place. The doctor evidently had just begun reading a short story, "Caterpillars." Fillmore remembered it with a shudder.

The doctor reentered the room and made a courteous remark concerning escapist literature, the likes of which Fillmore held in his hand. "Yes, yes, the Bensons *are* rather a dynasty," Sacker agreed. "I have another one, by Edward's brother, Robert Hugh. *The Mirror of Shallot*. Odd. Excellent."

Fillmore checked himself. He had been about to comment on the finding of the identical volume years later on the day he purchased the umbrella, but it occurred to him that the doctor would regard the assertion as further evidence that his wits weren't all in working order.

Supper was sumptuous, if simple fare. A roast beef, rare and huge. A brace of game. Trifle, coffee and brandy. The only disappointment was the Bordeaux, which was temporarily out of stock. In apology, Mrs. Raddle sent up a cherished tawny port, which Sacker set aside for post-dessert, if the professor so desired. The doctor clearly had no enthusiasm for the stuff. Fillmore, however, had not dined well since sharing supper with Mr. Pickwick, and he availed himself of all there was to be had, including the landlady's prize port, the effect of which was to lull him into a much-needed sleep.

He awoke with a start. It was dark in the room, and there wasn't a sound. He reached out, encountered a night-stand with a box of matches on it. He fumbled for one, lit it, noted the box to be one of those cheap cardboard pillboxes into which matches had been crammed. Perhaps it belonged to Holmes; it sounded like his brand of freeform adaptation, persian slippers used to hold shag tobacco, knives stuck to the mantel to fix correspondence in place . . .

There was a lamp nearby. Fillmore lit it and turned up the key so he could better determine what surroundings he had. It was a small bedchamber, plain, with a wardrobe and

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a low table with mirror behind it where Holmes assuredly put on his disguises. There was a piece of paper affixed to the mirror in a place where Fillmore could not help but notice. He rose and took the lamp with him so he could read what was wirrten thereon.

"My dear Fillmore," it said, "I had no idea your injury had so exhausted you. It was impossible to rouse you, and considering this as a physician, I am not so sure it will be wise for you to spend the better part of the night on a drafty railway train. Your resistance is low and you may do yourself an injury by coming, susceptible as you may be to sundry ills and fevers. I have put you in Holmes' bed, mine being uncharacteristically untidy and his having had the benefits of Mrs. Raddle's ministrations, and am off to catch the 10:40. If you do not sleep the night, you may wish to read; I will leave the drawing-room lights on for you. You are, of course, welcome to whatever fare you can find, and you may also use my toilet articles, shaving brush, etc. We shall return in a few days. If you feel the urgent need to see Holmes as soon as possible, you may, of course, join us in Cloisterham. The decision is yours. But, pertaining to the dangers you rehearsed, I must say, on your behalf, that a hasty perusal of Holmes' files shows that there is indeed in London one "Is. Persano," an athlete, duellist and singlestick competitor of awesome accomplishment. His card is checked in red ink, which Holes employes for particularly dangerous criminals. If this is the same individual whom you claim to have dogged you, it may be wisest to stay at Baker Street and do not set foot out-of-doors until we get back. But I must not miss the train. Farewell. O.S."

Fillmore was too drowsy to clear his head and recall the reference that was bumping about in the back of his brain. He still felt logy. Rubbing his eyes, yawning, he walked to the door connecting with the drawingroom/library. At least sleep had refreshed his memory on the matter of Mrs. Raddle. She was Bob Sawyer's landlady in Dickens, and a contributory vexation to Mr. Pickwick. A low, spiteful shrew who might do anything for money.

Roused from sleep, Fillmore's appetite has also returned. He wondered whether any of the beef was still left, or if it was all put away.

And what about the umbrella?

Certainly Sacker would have left it behind, yet Fillmore experienced a few qualms until he opened the door and saw the instrument propped in the same corner where he'd left it. That was reassuring; even more so was the sight of the unconsumed food still waiting, covered, on the table.

"The benevolent Dr. Sacker-alias-Watson," Fillmore beamed, stepping forward to lift the cover on the plate of beef. And then his warm sense of well-being plummeted and died.

There was a man seated in the doctor's easy chair by the fireside, a book on his lap; he was reading intently.

"By all means, sit and eat," Persano invited. "I have a few pages yet to go."

The man with the sliced nose did not even deign to look at Fillmore. He seemed possessed by the Benson volume in his hands.

Fillmore dashed over to the umbrella, and got a grip on it. He pushed aside the drapery that encloaked the left front window. The street outside was empty.

Should I smash through the glass,

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make a bit of a vault into the street? But a thought occurred to him concerning air-guns. He peered at the dark edifice directly opposite. A sudden glint of reflected light shone and was instantly gone, but it was enough to inform Fillmore that someone lurked behind one of the windows of Camden House, which must be the empty home across Baker Street from #221. (It was in Camden House that Colonel Moran lurked when he attempted to assassinate Sherlock in "The Adventure of the Empty House.")

There was no point in trying a dash for it. Unless there was a back way, Fillmore was trapped with Persano.

"In case you are in a gymnastic mood," Persano remarked, "allow me to advise you that the house is entirely surrounded. Now pray wait a moment longer. I have but a single page to complete."

Fillmore stood rooted to the spot, his appetite gone, waiting for the villainous Persano to come to the end of the tale in which he was engrossed.

Persano perceptibly shuddered as he closed the book. "That was indeed a horror!" he remarked. "I have always been a devotee of the fantastic. Are you familiar with the genre?"

Fillmore said nothing.

"Oh, come," said the other, "the mere matter of the umbrella and your inevitable demise can surely wait. There is nothing more soothing in this world than to contemplate something truly dreadful, such as Benson's 'Caterpillars', and then come safely back to this mundane world where the only atrocities are the humdrum stuff of daily business. The tale is not up to 'The Room in the Tower,' but then, what is? Still, the idea of ghastly crab-like caterpillars, giant ghostly creatures and their miniature daylight counterparts that scuttle about with their excrescent bodies and infect those that they bite with cancer—such is no ordinary *cauchemar*. It almost makes the idea of ordinary death-by-violence drab and comfortable.

Persano flashed his mirthless smile at Fillmore. Then, in a leisurely fashion, he extracted a thin cigar, bit off the end, spat it and requested a light from the scholar. Numbly, Fillmore tossed the pillbox to the other, who caught it, took out a match, struck it and lit the cigar.

Persano regarded the matchbox momentarily. "A box like this figures in the tale. Do you know it? An artist captures a miniature crab-like caterpillar and keeps it in the box until he changes his mind and treads on the insect, which seals his doom." His shoulders went up and he shivered in fear. "I believe if I found such a creature in this box, my mind would snap. I have seen the ravages of the disease." He regarded his cigar with melancholy dissatisfaction. "That is the curse of all earthly endeavor, is it not? We bargain and bully and bludgeon for our own ends, but in no wise can we crush the microbes that infest us from within. I should *hope* I should go mad and do terminal injury to myself rather than undergo such a horror as I once witnessed and have just read about." He regarded the professor darkly, then his wicked smile reappeared. "But I wax melancholy. Shall we proceed to brighter matters?"

"How did you get in?" Fillmore asked hoarsely.

"Ah, that's the spirit! Ask questions, buy time, my friend. Since you ask, The Raddle's holdings were recently purchased by our interests and we set her up here after the

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death of Mrs. Bardell. She was instructed to inform us if anyone of your description and pecular appurtenances—(he indicated the umbrella)—should appear to Dr. Sacker. I presume that you are an agent of Holmes, after all, in which case the dear boy is grown uncommon careless."

"I thought you'd drowned," Fillmore accused sullenly.

"Sorry for the disappointment. But be assured, sir, I hold no grudge for your maneuver. It was cleverly executed. But I am no mean swimmer. And as for tracking you down again, our system of surveillance is so thorough that you would have been found out in any event within a mere matter of hours. I confess, though, I did suspect that is where you would probably go. The only thing that at all bothered me was the possiblity that the umbrella might function once more. But it does not appear to be in any hurry to remove you from this unlucky world, does it?"

"One must finish a sequence," Fillmore grumbled.

"I beg your pardon?"

The scholar briefly explained the necessity of participating in some basic block of action correspondent to the base literary form of the cosmos in which one was deposited by the parasol.

Persano nodded. "I see. That explains why the Professor has not yet returned. But what a deuced unpleasant condition! Imagine, for instance, ending up in Stoker's Hungaria and having no other way out but to combat Count Dracula. A horror, this umbrella, if one were carried by it into a world of night."

"Yes," Fillmore observed, stalling for time, "but no one who knows how it works would deliberately choose such a place."

"Well, no matter," Persano said, extinguishing his cigar, "the time has come to terminate this disagreeable matter. You will give me the umbrella."

"I will not!"

Weariness etched lines on Persano's face as he contemplated a struggle. "Come, come, man, bow to the inevitable. You cannot escape, and you know it perfectly well. Moran has a bead drawn on the front of the house, and there are thugs in front and back." He consulted a pocket-watch. "It lacks two or three minutes of midnight. My men have been told to wait until twelve. If I have not returned by then with the umbrella, they are to forcibly enter and destroy you on sight. I'm afraid they would be rather messy about it."

Persano rose, picked up his cane, which had been resting on the floor, and withdrew the sword from its innermost depths. "Permit me to dispatch you swiftly and mercifully, while there is still time. It is the least I can do for so innovative and tenacious an opponent."

"Have at you, then!" Fillmore shouted, suddenly lofting the umbrella. Swinging it in both hands, he swept it at Persano in the manner of an antique broad-sword.

Persano appeared rather disappointed in Fillmore as he dodged the blow. "As a gentleman, I waited until you woke. Perhaps, after all, I should have slain you in your sleep." He parried an umbrella-swash with a neat turn of the wrist. "Didn't you read Sacker's message? I am expert at this. Your form is barely passable academy, and rusty at that."

Fillmore, not wasting energy replying, panted and puffed as he tried to hack Persano to pieces. But the other

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met each attack with easy indifference, not deigning to attempt getting under Fillmore's guard with his own stroke.

When, at last, the scholar collapsed, breathless, back against the wall, Persano clucked dolefully. "You expend precious time needlessly. There is but a scant minute ere the clock chimes twelve, and then there will be tedious butchery. For the love of order, sir, I entreat you to accept an easy death!"

Fillmore lowered the umbrella. "Well, then," he gasped, still winded, "I suppose I must recognize the inevitability of my mortality. But it's hard." He nodded for the stroke that would end his life.

Persano reached across the table and, seizing the tawny port, poured a measure into a wine-glass. He approached Fillmore, sword in one hand, the glass in the other. He held out the wine for the professor to take. "Drink this. It contains a potent sleeping-draught. When the doctor called for Bordeaux, The Raddle, following my instructions, brought this instead. It works quickly. I will withhold the *coup de grace* until you slumber."

Fillmore took the wine. The clock began to chime midnight as he raised the glass to his lips . . .

No!

The instinct for survival was too strong. He tried to dash the liquor into Persano's eyes, but the villain, half-expecting the gesture, ducked; the wine spattered his shirt. Persano's hand shot out. He grabbed the umbrella and wrenched it around, but Fillmore desperately resisted.

The two struggled fiercely, silently. But the exertions of the day were too much for Fillmore and he finally collapsed beneath the weight and superior strength of the other. Persano, pulled off balance, toppled onto his opponent, but even as he did, he jammed his elbow against Fillmore's throat.

"You *do* believe in last-minute heroics! You can't say I didn't try to bring you a painless death."

He stood up, planting a foot hard against Fillmore's chest, pinioning him. A pounding noise at the street door. The landlady shot the bolt. Coarse voices, the sound of many feet pounding up the stairs.

"My men," said Persano, mildly regretful. "Farewell." He poised the sword in the air, ready to plunge it into Fillmore's throat.

The scholar braced himself. A wave of hatred for Persano supplanted what fear he might have felt. He clutched the umbrella, wishing he could wield it one more time. His thumb brushed against the release-catch.

The tip of the sword started down for Fillmore's jugular. But as it did, something unexpected happened.

The umbrella snapped open with a click.

Chapter Seven

THERE WERE DARK, rolling clouds overhead, and in the air the heavy, oppressive sense of thunder. Slowly the darkness fell, and as it did, Fillmore felt a strange chill overtake him, and a lonely feeling.

Of Persano, there was no trace. He'd fallen off somewhere during the flight of the umbrella, his sword flailing wildly as he fell, screaming, to whichever earth Fillmore's distracted imagination dictated.

A dog began to howl in a farmhouse somewhere far down the road—a long, agonized wailing, as if from fear. The sound was taken up by another

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dog, and then another and another, till, borne on the wind which sighed along the dark and lonely mountain road, a cacophony of howling tormented his ears. In the sound, too, there was a deeper chuckling menace—that of wolves.

An arch of trees hemmed in the road, which became a kind of tunnel leading somewhere that he dreaded to contemplate. But there was no use trying to avoid a sequence, that was one fact he'd finally learned. The professor trudged on in the darkness, shivering at the icy air of the heights. The trees were soon replaced by great frowning rocks on both sides; the rising wind moaned and whistled through them and it grew colder and colder still. Fine powdery snow began to fall, driving against his pinched face, settling in his eyebrows and on the rims of his ears.

The baying of the wolves sounded nearer and nearer. Off a ways to the left, Fillmore thought he could discern faint flickering blue flames, ghost-lights that beckoned to him, but he fearfully ignored them.

How long he trod the awful lightless road, he could not tell. The rolling clouds obscured the moon and he could not read the crystal of his watch, nor could he strike a match. Persano had never returned them.

The path kept ascending, with occasional short downward respites. Suddenly the road emerged from the rock-tunnel and led across a broad, high expanse into the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black casements no light shone. Against the moonlit sky, Fillmore studied the jagged line of broken battlements and knew instinctively where he was.

A bit worse than Persano, he mused, approaching the great main door, old and studded with large iron nails, set in a projecting arch of massive stone. There was no bell or knocker, but he had no doubt that soon the tenant would sense his presence and admit him.

Perhaps it would be better to flee. But he did not relish the thought of another minute on the freezing road with the wolves constantly drawing nearer. True, he'd heard them to be much maligned animals, gentle and shy, but somehow he found it hard to believe at that moment.

The occupant of the castle was fiercer than wolves, but Fillmore guessed it was his destiny to meet him, and if so, it would be better to do so face to face rather than hide and wait for *him* to seek Fillmore out.

The matter was settled when he heard a heavy step approaching behind the door. A gleam of light appeared through the chinks. Chains rattled, huge bolts clanged back, a key turned in a seldom-used lock and the rusty metal noisily protested. But at last, the portal swang wide.

An old man stood there, clean shaven but for a white mustache, dressed in black from head to toe. He held an old silver lamp in his hand; it threw flickering shadows everywhere. He spoke in excellent English, tinged, however, with the dark coloration of a middle-European accent.

"I bid you welcome. Enter freely and of your own will." He did not move. But neither did Fillmore. A frown creased the old man's brow. He spoke again. "Welcome to my house. Come freely. Go safely; and leave something of the happiness you bring!"

A bit better, Fillmore thought, stepping across the threshold. As he did, the host grasped his hand in a cold grip strong enough to make him

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wince.

Fillmore started to speak, but the tall nobleman held up his hand for silence until the howling of the wolves had died away.

"Listen to them," he beamed. "Children of the night! What music they make!"

Damn Persano! Fillmore swore to himself *I'm right! He would have to put such a notion into my head just before the umbrella opened!*

He followed his host upstairs. En route, he had to tear a passage through a gigantic spider-web.

The tall man smiled, and Fillmore knew what he was about to say. "The spider—" he began, but the professor finished it for him.

"—spinning his web for the unwary fly. For the blood is the life, eh?"

The Count frowned. "How did you know what was in my mind?"

Filmore shrugged. "Bit of a fey quality, I fancy."

SOME 500 miles distant from the castle is a town, Sestri di Levante, situated on the Italian Riviera. Near it stands the Villa Cascana on a high promontory overlooking the iridescent blue of the Ligurian Sea.

It was the latter part of a glorious afternoon in spring. The sun sparkled on the water, dazzling the eye so the place where the chestnut forest above the villa gave way to pines could not easily be discerned.

A *loggia* ran about the pleasant house, and outside a gravel path threaded past a fountain of Cupid through a riot of magnolias and roses. In the middle of the garden there suddenly appeared a stranger, walking with a cane. He seemed bewildered.

"I've lost him temporarily," Persano murmured. "But he must be in this world, and if he is, I'll find him and finish him at last. Then I'll take the umbrella and go home. Meantime, there are far less pleasant places where I have might have ended up."

He gazed about, noting with pleasure the marble fountain playing merrily nearby. He drank in the salty freshness of the sea-wind and decided it would be a good place to sit and devise a scheme of action. Persano strolled the gravel-path and stopped at a bench near the Cupid fountain. He sat down and lit a cigar with the last match remaining in the pillbox he'd secured from Fillmore. He tossed away the empty box. It arced high and landed in the fountain.

Overhead, a bird twitted in the chestnuts. Someone seated in the villa—spying Persano and wondering who he was—hailed the stranger, but the shouted greeting received no answer. Persano was staring at the pillbox bobbing on the surface of the water. An awful presentiment overtook him, and the blood drained from his face.

Slowly, reluctantly, step by step, he dragged himself to the fountain and stared, horrified, at the floating pillbox, which had landed open, like a miniature boat braving the crests of the fountain freshet.

A small caterpillar had crawled into the cardboard box and was scuttling this way and that. It was most unusual in color and loathsome in appearance: gray-yellow with lumps and excrescences on its rings, and an opening on one end that aspirated like a mouth. Its feet resembled the claws of a crab.

Persano's eyes bulged as the creature, sensing his presence, began to crawl out of the box and swim in his direction . . .

"I ADMIT you are an unusual visitor,"

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said Dracula. "An interesting fellow, if that is the slang these days. Try some of this wine. It is very old."

"No thank you," Fillmore demurred, having had his fill of soporifics-in-disguise. "I *must* say that you are an excellent host. The chicken was excellent, if thirsty."

"Perhaps you would prefer beer?" the vampire asked, anxious to please.

"If I can open the bottle myself."

Dracula shook his head. "You do me wrong. There are ancient customs which no host may defy, even if he be—how do the peasants call it?—*nosferatu!*"

"Yes, but I seem to recall the case of one Johnathan Harker—"

"Harker?" Dracula echoed surprised. "How do you know him? He is at this moment on the way from England to conduct some business for me."

"And you have no intention of letting him leave here *not* undead," Fillmore accused Dracula.

"You wrong me, young sir. When the formula I repeated below is stated by a host and a nobleman, it dare not be violated. *I will do nothing to prevent* Harker's departure."

"Except lock the doors and ring the castle with wolves," Fillmore countered sarcastically.

The vampire shrugged. "If I did not lock the doors, the wolves might get in . . ."

"Well, at any rate, you can see why I do not trust your wine."

"Yes," Dracula nodded, "you seem totally cognizant of my identity, nature and intentions. But knowing all this, why would you enter here of your own free will?"

"Well, it's a long story."

Dracula smiled icily. "I have until sun-up."

So Fillmore told the story of the umbrella yet again, omitting only the references to Mrs. Bardell's cut throat and the near-skewering of his own jugular by Persano . . . details that he was afraid might disagreeably excite the Count.

"Hah! Can such things be?" the vampire mused once the tale was done. His piercing eyes shone with an unholy crimson light. "Long ago, what arcane researches I carried on, seeking things beyond the mundane world in which I felt trapped. And the things I discovered only proved a far worse incarceration for me. But this—this umbrella—what opportunity lies within its' mystic compass!"

Fillmore began to grow uneasy. He'd spun out the history till close to daybreak, figuring that the coming dawn would enable him to escape while Dracula slept. Even more to the point, he mentally punned, he might be able to rid the place of the vampire with a stroke of the point of his umbrella and, in such wise, complete the sequence and get out of this world of horror into which his fight with Persano had unluckily plunged him.

It escaped him until that moment that Dracula might look on the parasol as a far greater tool for spreading the brood of the devil than the original plan he'd devised to purchase Carfax Abbey from John Harker and move to England and its teeming millions. But how could London compare with the available necks of countless billions in worlds without number?

Fillmore stole a nervous glance towards the casement, hoping that dawn might shine through it soon. By no means could he allow the umbrella to fall into Dracula's hands!

"The night is nearly ended," the caped nobleman said, rising. His eyes fixed Fillmore's in an hypnotic stare.

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"I must sleep the day. Let me show you your room."

"The octagonal one, I know. Never mind, I'll find it." Fillmore strode across the large chamber and opened the door to his bedchamber. It was just where Stoker said it would be. At the door, he paused and fixed the vampire with a stern gaze that he hoped would command respect.

"I depend on you, Count, to be as good as your word. A vampire may lie—but a nobleman, never."

"We understand each other perfectly well," Dracula smiled, bowing his head gravely. "I have given my word, and I will repeat it. No harm to you shall come from *me*."

And he strode from the room, slamming the door shut behind him. Fillmore hurried to the portal and tried it, but it was securely locked.

The professor was worried. Dracula could not be trusted, and yet he had given his word as a patrician. Could he go against it, evil though he was? Fillmore did not think so.

He walked back to his room and stretched out on the bed, exhausted from the perils of the umbrella's flight and the terrible walk through the Carpathian forest. He began to sink into a delicious lassitude.

No, no, no, no, no, no! his mind repeated over and over, a still, small voice protesting a fact out of joint, a snag in logic, an unforeseen menace . . .

"I have given my word, and I will repeat it. No harm to you shall come from me."

Dracula did not say Fillmore would be unharmed. He said *he* would not *personally* hurt him.

Fillmore tried to get up, but his limbs were leaden. Above him, not far away, a dancing swirl of dust-motes pirouetted in a beam of moonlight. In the middle of the mist shone two mocking golden eyes, like those of an animal's.

He tried to groan, but no sound emerged. He had forgotten Dracula's three undead mistresses who lived (?) with him in the vaults beneath the castle.

The fairest and most favored of the three was in the coffin-shaped room with Fillmore, baring her teeth for the inevitable bite.

He fell into a merciful swoon.

Chapter Eight

SOME DAYS, it is nigh onto impossible to get out of bed. The body, filled with a not altogether unpleasant lassitude, refuses to function. Too weak to protest, the mind feebly struggles to rouse the limbs, but to no avail, so weak is the will, so sapped the corporeal being. Easier to capitulate, to drift in that half-state between slumber and waking.

And so Fillmore remained in a condition of wan enthrallment for the greater part of the day. Only as the autumnal gloom began to draw in, signaling the approach of evening, did his torpid brain make an effort to gather in those wandering fantasies which possessed it and pack them away. Very deep within, clawing at the prison-door of consciousness, a voice urged him to wake.

He pushed himself up unwillingly and sat on the edge of the soft bed, head dangling, trying to recollect where he was.

A wolf greeted the oncoming sunset.

With a start, he sat bolt upright, remembering everything. He peered across the room with nervous dread, but to his surprise, the umbrella was still there. Getting to his feet, sway-

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ng from unexpected weakness, he urched over to it and tried pressing he catch, but, as he anticipated, it lid not open. He turned this way and hat, seeking a mirror, finally recalling hat Dracula did not keep any such eminders of his vampiric status about he house.

When Fillmore put a hand to his eck, he knew he needed no glass to onfirm what his fingers felt. He vinced at the two tender spots, the iny punctures that still felt tacky.

Luckily, according to Bram Stoker, ampires rarely finish off a victim in ne night. But Fillmore felt so ener ated that he very much doubted vhether he could survive a second at ack.

And the sun was going down.

He ran to the large casement in the lining-room and stared out. The cas le was built on a rocky precipice. he valley, spread out far below and hreaded with raging torrents, was uch a great distance straight down hat if he fell, only a parachute could ave him.

But how did Harker escape in *)racula*? He emulated the Count, reeping from rugged stone to stone, rawling down the side of the castle ike a great lizard to the courtyard nderneath. But the drop was sheer, vith no apparent footholds or niches or the hands to grasp. Nor was there courtyard; only cruel and jagged ocks . . .

He ran to his room and pushed pen the narrow aperture. The same ista—exit was impossible from either vindow!

Then how did Harker scale the :alls? He beat his fists against his emples, thinking, thinking. He re nembered that, in the novel, the so icitor walked out the dining-room loor into the corridor and explored the vast pile. Somehwere on the cas tle's south side must be the window that permitted access to the lower floors and the courtyard.

But the door to the corridor was locked.

Fillmore tore about like a madman, trying the door at the end opposite the octagonal room, but it, too, was locked. He set his back to the main door and bumped it, but the only thing that gave was his back.

Darting to the window a second time, he watched in fascinated horror as the sun dipped beneath the ridges and crests of the mountains. Only a thin slice of the golden rim remained on the horizon.

Figure another five or six minutes worth of sunlight, and perhaps an equal time of after-light. Another minute for the vampires to rouse themselves and come up here. Then, at the most generous estimate I have an unlucky thirteen minutes to—

"Well, say it!" he snapped at himself, aloud. "To save myself from a fate worse than death. Literally."

The teacher sat upon the edge of his bed and applied his mind to his predicament. Panic would accomplish nothing, he realized, so he might as well employ the residue of time in seeing whether there were any way out at all.

A chorus of wolves shivered on the rising wind.

He shuddered.

"There's enough of that, damn it!" he told himself. "It's about time I stopped behaving like a victim everywhere I fly to. Let's see now: can't get out the doors, windows are too high up, no way to safely climb down the wall. I'd probably dash my brains out, anyway, even if I tried it."

And then a new and startling notion flashed into his mind. He jumped to

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his feet and nervously paced the room.

"No time to follow it all up," he declaimed aloud like the actor he once aspired to be, "but some of it *must* be scanned! Is there an alternative reason? Quick—work out a chain of logic!"

He ticked off propositions on his fingertips. "*One:* a sequence has to be completed wherever one goes with the umbrella. *Two:* I am no longer in the Holmesian rough-draft world. *Hence:* I completed the sequence there. But how? Some of the literary works on which that place is based were unfinished in *my* original earth. Could it be that my adventure with Persano stopped just because it isn't over?!"

Fillmore shook his head. "Too many paradoxes. *The Pickwick Papers* was complicated by Dickens, and that was—is—a part of Persano's world. So events cannot be dictated by literature that I know, at least not entirely. Which is confusing, but forget philosophy for now; ask Holmes, if I live to meet him!" He put the issue behind him with a flourish of one hand, a gesture he often used when confronting an adamantly incorrect student. "The vital question now is—*why did the umbrella open*?"

Only one answer fit. When Persano aimed his sword at Fillmore's throat, the scholar's life in that world was, for all practical purposes, terminated. Therefore, the sequence had to be at an end, and the umbrella finally worked.

Therefore, in a world of horror, where there are victims galore, all one must do to escape is . . . die.

He certainly hoped he was right.

Picking up the umbrella, Fillmore strode purposefully to the window and tried opening it. But the rusty latch would not budge. He spied a immense pewter candelabra, seized i and hurled the thing forcibly. I bumped the glass and clattered to th floor.

"*Hell*!" Exasperated, he stuck hi face against the window and saw tha it was doubly thick. He also perceive that the last sliver of sun was gon and the after-light was fading swiftly.

Then, from far below in the ver bowels of the castle, he heard metallic grating noise, followed by a iron thunderous clang, like a grea door slammed open. Desperately h wrestled with one of the Count' chairs. It was incredibly heavy, an took a tremendous effort of the wil for him to loft it at all, let alone swin it. But swing it he did, and the win dow shattered most gratifyingly. Th massive piece of furniture tumble after the raining shards down, dow into the depths of the valley.

Fillmore scrambled onto th window-seat, umbrella in hand thumb on the catch. Gazing out at th panoramic vista, he felt queasy Heights terrified him. If he were wrong, and the umbrella did no open, he would crushed on the rock and then—since he had been bitter by the vampire-woman—he migh have to join the legions of the un dead.

There was the sound of a heavy tread in the corridor outside. Screw ing up his courage, Fillmore forced himself to look out at the landscape and conquer his fear of falling. He saw the valley cloaked in shadow, and very far off, the glint of rushing wa ter, a distant cataract.

The cataract strong then—

"NO!" he admonished himself. "No other literature this time, just Sher lock Holmes!"

—cataract strong then plunges

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along—

"Sherlock Holmes!"

—striking and raging as if a war waging—

"Sherlock Holmes, Sherlock Holmes, Sherlock Holmes!"

—its caverns and rocks among—

"SHERLOCK HOLMES!" Fillmore shouted, jumping out the window.

Behind him, in the room, the doors flung wide. The blond fiend raced to the window, snarling.

"Gone!" she howled, turning to accuse her mate. "How did you dare permit this? You might have taken the umbrella while he slept!"

The Count, entering with a swirl of his cape, coldly replied, "I pledged my word I would not harm him. I may be a vampire, but I am a Nobleman first, and a *boyar* does not break his word." In truth, Dracula had realized that transporting fifty boxes of native soil across the dimensions would be a grueling project. London was quite good enough . . .

The woman told him precisely what she thought of his aristocratic airs. "Your precious blue blood," she snapped spitefully, "is tainted with the plasma of the lowest village peasants."

"And yours isn't?" he sneered, staring haughtily down his long aquiline nose at her.

"The least you could have done would have been to hide the thing so I could have supped again!"

"As for that," said Dracula, waving his hand with grand disdain, "you are already more plump than is seemly."

"*Plump*?!" she screamed. "You told me that's the way you like me best!"

The matter proceeded through a great many more exchanges and retorts, but it is perhaps indelicate to dwell at length on the secrets of patrician domestic life, and so it were good to draw the present chapter to a close.

Chapter Nine

FILLMORE WANTED to throw up, but he was too terrified to move. Below, the ferocious cataract raged. A needle-spritz of foam slashed up through the curtain of mist created by the falls, occasionally spattering droplets on his face. The long sweep of green water whirled and clamoured, producing a kind of half-human shout which boomed out of the abyss with the spray.

"Miserable damned umbrella!" he grumbled. "I said 'Sherlock Holmes' time and again—NOT *The Cataract of Lordore*!"

The shelf on which the umbrella had deposited him was barely big enough for his posterior. Fortunately, it (the shelf) was cut high and deep enough so he could arch his back against the black stone. There was just enough space to stand the umbrella upright next to him along the vertical axis of the niche, but otherwise there was no room to move or turn. Evenutally, he supposed, he would either fall into the chasm or else figure a way to get down safely.

His feet dangled precariously over the edge. Below them, the cliff bellied out so he could not see straight down. But to the right, he spied a footpath that looked as if it ought to pass directly beneath his perch. Yet to the left there was a sheer drop into the torrent, so he could not be certain that the path extended all the way to the point just south of where he sat. If it did, he might be able to slide down the cliff-side and land on the narrow walkway. It looked about a yard wide, surely large enough to break the momentum of his fall.

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But what if the path stopped before it got to where he was sitting? Then he'd plummet right down the mountain.

Well, sooner or later I'll have to risk it. Unless—

Unless the umbrella had whisked him back to his own world, where Southey's cataract was situated. Sequence-rules did not seem to apply to one's home cosmos (or else the bumbershoot could not have operated in the first place, or so Fillmore reasoned).

He pushed the button half-heartedly. Nothing happened. He was still stuck on the meager rocky mantel.

He glanced above him and saw, too far to reach, a bigger niche, covered with soft green moss. He looked down and was seized by vertigo. He shut his eyes and shoved his back against the eroded cliff-wall, wishing he could sink inside it.

"Get hold of yourself! If you have to drop, you'd better be in full control of your muscles!" he told himself, wishing that he could somehow find a way to shut off the sound of the cascading flood—a strange, melancholy noise like lost souls lamenting in the deep recess of the pool into which the churning streams poured.

He tried to reestablish his equilibrium by turning his attention to the expanse of blue sky above him. The weather was mild and there was a pleasant breeze that he wished, all the same, would stop tugging and flapping his sleeve like insistent child-fingers begging him to come play in the rapids below. There were few clouds and none obscured the sun which shone high and bright.

Gazing nervously into the heavens, squinting to minimize the glare, Fillmore suddenly opened his eyes wide in surprise. A fact popped into his head, something he'd read in the rubric to *The Cataract of Lodore* in the textbook he used to teach English Romantic Fiction.

"Tourists who make special jaunts to view the site which inspired Southey's famous exercise in onomatopoeia are generally disappointed because—"

Because why? How did the rest of the rubric read?

Before the thought could be brought to mind, Fillmore was distracted by the sound of approaching footsteps . . . a rapid, yet heavy tread.

He sighed with relief. *Maybe it'll be someone who can help me get down from here!*

The footsteps neared. Fillmore stared down at the footpath curving around the mountainside to his right. A long moment passed, during which the footfalls grew louder, but slowed to a walk. And then a man rounded the bend and emerged into the professor's angle of vision.

The newcomer was extremely tall and thin. Clean-shaven, with a great dome of forehead and eyes sunk deep in his skull, the stranger was pale and ascetic in cast. Chalk-dust clung to his sleeves and his shoulders were rounded and his head protruded forward as if he had spent too much time in closet study of abstruse intellectual problems.

Stopping in the middle of the narrow path, he peered with puckered, angry eyes at a place some steps in front of him. He spoke in an ironical tone of voice.

"Well, sir," he said, "as you are wont to quote, 'Journeys end in lovers meeting.'"

For a brief, disoriented second, Fillmore thought he himself was

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being addressed. Then there was a murmur from a spot directly beneath the ledge where he was dizzily balanced, and he realized that someone had been waiting all the while right under him, hidden by the bellying rock-swell that the mountainside described just below his feet.

"I warned you I would never stand in the dock," the tall man said in a dry, reprimanding voice. "Yet you have persevered in your attempts to bring justice upon my head."

The unseen man murmured a laconic reply.

"In truth," the other continued, "I doubted that you could so effectively quash the network of crime it took me so long to build up. But you have outstripped your potential, and I underestimated you, to my cost." As he spoke, his head was never still, but moved in a slow oscillating pattern from side to side, like some cold-blooded reptile. "However," he went on, "you have also underestimated me. I said if you were clever enough to bring destruction on me, I would do the same for you. I do not make idle threats."

Another murmur Fillmore could not hear—more protracted this time—and then the tall one grimly nodded. "Yes, I will wait that long. He who stands on the brink of world's-end rarely objects to the delay of a second or two before time stops."

Crossing his arms patiently, he waited silently, staring fixedly at the person Fillmore could not see.

But by then, of course, the teacher knew the identity of both antagonists, seen and unseen. With the knowledge came the recollection of the forgotten detail pertaining to the cataract of Lodore.

"Tourists who make special jaunts to view the site which inspired Southey's famous exercise in onomatopoeia," said the rubric, "are generally disappointed because the falls dry up by the time they visit in summer. The Lodore falls are best seen in colder weather."

The sky and sun and the breeze told Fillmore it must be late spring. Therefore, the cascading waters below could not be Lodore.

It had to be Reichenbach Falls, instead.

Reichenbach Falls . . . scene of the dramatic final meeting between Sherlock Holmes and his arch-enemy, Professor Moriarty . . . perfectly logical, considering that Fillmore simultaneously thought of Holmes and a waterfall. The umbrella took him precisely where it had been told.

All the same, he mused grumpily, *it might have picked a less disagreeable ringside seat!*

And yet, for all his fearful giddiness, Fillmore felt a bit like an Olympian looking down on the petty squabbling of puny mortals. The analogy was furthered by the fact that he knew both what was taking place and that which was about to happen.

Right now, he thought, *Holmes is writing a farewell message to Watson. When he finishes it, he'll put it on top of a boulder close by and anchor the paper by placing his silver cigarette-case upon it.*

Fillmore had read "The Final Problem" several times. It was a bitter tale, the one in which Arthur Conan Doyle tried to kill off his famous detective; Fillmore often wondered what it must have been like to read it when it first appeared in print, not knowing that Holmes would be resurrected in print, not knowing that Holmes would be resurrected ten years later in "The Adventure of the Empty House." (Fillmore grinned to himself, thinking

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of the heresy his mind had just committed: referring to Conan Doyle as the author of the Holmes tales. "Are ye mad, man?" his pals at the local branch of the Baker Street Irregulars would say. "Watson wrote those *factual* accounts. Doyle was just the good Doctor's literary agent!")

Fillmore finally knew what he was going to do: simply wait until the adventure ran its course. Holmes would finish the message, rise and walk to the edge of the footpath. Moriarty, disdaining weaponry, would fling himself upon his enemy and the pair would struggle and tussle on the very edge of the falls. At the last, Holmes' superior knowledge of baritsu ("the Japanese system of wrestling, which has more than once been very useful to me") would win the day and Moriarty would take the horrible, fatal plunge alone. Then Fillmore could hail Holmes, who would surely help him to get down.

After that, I'll warn him that Colonel Moran is skulking about here someplace and—

And?

There was no point in making any other plans just yet. If Holmes were unable to rescue him from the awful ledge, there would be no future for J. Adrian (Blah!) Fillmore!

At that moment, Moriarty unfolded his arms.

"If the message is done, sir," he said, "then I presume we may proceed with this matter?"

A murmur and then footsteps.

He's walking to the end of the path. Now Moriarty will follow him and suddenly try to push Holmes off balance.

Moriarty did not move. A mirthless trace of humor tilted up the corner of his mouth.

Fillmore was suddenly seized by the chill premonition, that something extremely unpleasant was about to take place.

"You surprise me at the last," the evil Professor remarked. "Had you expected some gentleman's Code of Honor, sir? My foolish lieutenant Persano might subscribe to such nonsense, but then again, he would be better suited physically to grapple with a man thoroughly skilled in singlestick. *And* baritsu."

"*What*?!" It was the first time Fillmore heard the crisp voice beneath him.

"Come, come," said Moriarty, drawing a revolver out of his coat, "I keep files on my enemies, too, you know."

No! This is wrong! Fillmore was stunned. *This isn't how the story turns out!*

"I am vexed," Moriarty stated. "You have twice underestimated me, sir." He raised the pistol and aimed.

Fillmore had no time to wonder whether direct interference might change the texture of the world he was in—it was *already* different. He did not concern himself, either, with the dangers of subsumption or, for that matter, the more immediate risk that he might break his neck.

Transferring the umbrella to his right hand, he shoved himself off the perch with a yell to warn the detective below. As he descended, he flailed the umbrella in Moriarty's direction.

The Professor immediately raised his arm and snapped off a shot at Fillmore, but he was aiming at a moving target and the bullet ricocheted harmlessly off a boulder. Before he could fire a second time, Holmes grasped his arm in an iron grip and instantly afterwards, Fillmore landed on the path in a heap.

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The arch-antagonists struggled violently scant inches from the end of the walkway. Fillmore did his best to get out from underfoot, but elbows poked his ribs and feet trod his toes. He was an integral part of the *mêleé*.

The detective grunted. The criminal cursed. They swayed on the very lip of the precipice. Then Holmes unexpectedly and slickly slipped out of Moriarty's grip. The movement set the Professor off balance. With a cry of fear, he flailed, both hands clawing the air. One touched the grip of the umbrella and, instinctively, Moriarty clutched at it, wrenching it from Fillmore's grasp.

Forgetting all danger, Fillmore lurched forward and tried to get the umbrella back, but Moriarty, uttering one long terrified scream, pitched over backwards into the abyss.

Fillmore scrambled on his hands and knees to the edge and, with Holmes, watched the Napoleon of Crime falling, falling, the umbrella wildly waving. He vanished from view in the scintillating curtain of spray.

For a long while they watched, but they could not discern any movement in the maelstrom. Still, Fillmore thought he could hear Moriarty's cry of terror eternally intermingled with the half-human roar of the falls.

Rousing themselves, they walked down the path a ways. Then the tall, thin man with the well-remembered face addressed Fillmore good-humoredly.

"In the past," he chuckled, "I have been skeptical of the workings of Providence, but nevermore shall I doubt the efficacy of a *deus ex machina,* no matter what guise it descends in!"

Fillmore would have replied but they were all at once interrupted by a barrage of rocks from above.

"That would be Colonel Moran," Fillmore remarked. "He's just about on schedule."

Holmes looked at him curiously but decided to forestall all questions until after they escaped from the assiduous administrations of Moriarty's sole surviving lieutenant.

Explication-and Epilogue

LATE THAT EVENING, two men sat drinking ale in a pothouse in Rosenlaui. For a long while, only one of them spoke, but at last, he ended his narrative.

"That is certainly the most singular history I have ever heard," said the other, taller one, signaling to the waiter for more brew. "It is more surprising to me than that awful business at Baskerville and, at least to you, quite as harrowing."

"And now," said Fillmore, "I suppose you are going to suggest I consult a specialist in obscure nervous diseases?"

"Not at all, old chap," the lean detective grinned. "There is an internal cohesion that I should be prompted to trust in, to begin with. But knowing all that I do about the late Professor Moriarty, your tale makes considerable sense."

"It *does*?"

"Moriarty himself prefigured the possibility of a dimensional-transfer engine in his brilliant paper on *The Dynamics of an Asteroid.* Not in so many words, you understand, but the concept was buried within if one had the comprehension and the philosophical tools to prize it forth. The Professor certainly foresaw the ramifications of his theory, at least in this interesting—and rather distressing—side-channel of his research. I shudder to think what might have happened had he manufactured

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enough of them to arm his entire army of villains! Criminal justice in England (perhaps in the entire cosmos, eventually) would be totally unworkable." Holmes tapped his fingers against the frosted stein which the waiter set down before him. "Of course, I suppose it would have then been up to me to devise a similar engine and make it available to society at large." He shook his head, smiling ruefully. "I wish you could have held onto it. I should have been most interested in examining it."

"I'm extremely disappointed myself," Fillmore said. "I came here specifically to ask you about the umbrella, and now it's gone!"

"You wanted to find out how it worked?"

"No," he replied, shaking his head. "I wanted to learn *why* it works so strangely."

Holmes laughed. "Oh, you are referring, I suppose, to the business of its taking you to so-called 'literary' dimensions?"

Fillmore nodded. He had a sudden inkling of what Holmes was about to say.

"That, my dear Fillmore, is quite elementary! The physics and mathematics of space strongly imply the co-existence of many worlds in other dimensions. What are these places like? Surely, space is so infinite that there must be an objective reality to planets of every conceivable kind, variances and patterns mundane and fantastic."

"Yes, yes, but why *literary* permutations?"

"You have been going about the problem backwards," said Holmes. "These places do not exist because people on your earth dreamed them up. I should say rather the reverse was more likely."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning the 'fiction' of your prosaic earth must be borrowed, in greater or lesser degree, from notions and conceptions that occur across the barriers of the dimensions. Have you not heard writers (though surely not Watson) protest that they do not know from what heaven their inspirations descend? Even my good friend the doctor's agent, Conan Doyle, has sometimes told me that he invents characters in his historical romances that 'write themselves.' Does this not suggest that these artists may be unwittingly tapping the logical premisses of other parallel worlds?"

"Then, in my case—" Fillmore began, but Holmes already knew:

"Of course! You are an instructor in literature and drama. Your mind is evidently psychically attuned to the alternative earths which the literature of your world has told you of—and succeeded in captivating your imagination with."

Fillmore nodded and sipped his ale. They sat in silence for a few moments before he spoke again.

"Your theory makes a great deal of sense, and yet—"

"And yet?"

"It does not totally explain why it has been necessary for me to complete a sequence of action in each world I visit."

Holmes nodded. "That, I should say, is a three-pipe problem. But it will have to be left for a time when we can breathe more freely. Colonel Moran will surely pick up our trail before the night is over. We must proceed swiftly, and you must stay close by. Since he may have observed your role in the death of his chief, you may well be marked for extermination."

"I don't mind at all sticking with you," Fillmore admitted as they rose

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from the table, "especially since I have no recourse now but to be subsumed."

"I am not positive that subsumption is an inevitable function of the umbrella," said Holmes, insisting on taking the check, "but you are right to the extent that the instrument is now out of reach of our human resources."

They walked out of the tavern and inhaled the clear, cold air of evening.

"I suppose you do not intend to get in touch with Watson, under the circumstances?"

"No," Holmes shook his head, "it would involve him in too great a risk. The dear boy is an innocent when it comes to dissembling. Moran will reason my path lies homeward, but if I do go to London, there will be danger for all and sundry. Moran might kidnap Watson to flush me out. No, I must stay away from England for a time."

"And therefore you will change your name to Sigerson and—"

"How the devil did you know that?!" Holmes snapped, his brows beetling. Then his face cleared and he nodded merrily. "Of course! You have a contemporaneous awareness of certain likely events in this world. But I pray, sir, if we are to be travel companions, please refrain from casting yourself too often in the role of a Nostradamus. There is a piquancy to quotidian unawareness of one's Fate."

Fillmore agreed and they walked on for a time in silence. Then Holmes suggested that the professor ought to consider what role he might want to assume in the present world.

"Why, no one knows me here," the other said in some amazement. "Why should I need to be anyone but myself?"

"Because you will bring us into rather risky focus during our travels abroad if you insist on remaining a man without a background and point of origin. First thing we must do is purchase a good set of false papers. You will need a well-worked-out history—"

"And a new name!" Fillmore said suddenly and decisively.

"What on earth for? What's wrong with the one you have?"

"I thoroughly detest it!"

"Yes, yes, but you are apt to slip up if you stray too far from your original nomenclature. If you *must* pick a new name, choose one close enough to the present one so it won't take long to get used to it."

"Very well," Fillmore agreed, lapsing into thoughtful silence.

I'll get rid of that hateful middle name and call myself by my original first one, the one my aunt didn't like because it belonged to my father. A bitter memory crossed his mind, and he determined to be done entirely with the painful past. *The hell with the surname, too! I'll go back to the old spelling.*

They stumped along for another quarter-hour and at last Holmes suggested they take shelter in the barn he saw upon the rise and stay there until the morning came. Fillmore agreed.

A few minutes later, they stretched out in straw and prepared to slumber. A peculiar idea occurred to the scholar at that moment, and he smiled.

"Something amusing?" Holmes asked.

Fillmore nodded. "It just crossed my mind . . . if your theory is correct and artists in my world really do unwittingly borrow from the events of alternative earths, then it is possible that I am already figuring in some work of literature back where I came from!"

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Holmes chuckled. "I do not think I am going to dwell on that thought just now. My poor tired brain has had enough of metaphysics for one day!"

With that, the Great Detective said good night and went to sleep.

His companion lay there for a long time, thinking about the morrow when he would take on his new name and identity and start a new life. The professor gazed into the darkness and pondered the perilous perplexities of the stars.

In his cozy Victorian study, the doctor gazed down on the new manuscript. The thing was more fun, he thought, if he could think of the perfect name.

There was already evidence that his readers enjoyed the wry device of Watson's "stories-yet-to-be-told." It was a clever method of injecting humor into the often grim tales: tease the readers with promises of outlandish-sounding stories not yet written up by Watson.

For instance, there was the adventure of the Grice-Pattersons in the Isle of Uffa (wherever that was!) or the Repulsive Tale of the Red Leech, or—among the most outrageous—"the strange case of Isadora Persano, the well-known duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a matchbox in front of him which contained a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science . . ."

But this name now: J. Adrian Fillmore. It didn't have quite the properly quaint tone he was seeking. It was a trifle stuffy and stolid. Perhaps it was the middle name . . . try eliminating it. And what might the initial stand for? John? James? (He chortled as he thought of the printer's error that caused Watson's wife to call him James by mistake. What a tizzy of pseudo-scholastic comment that had provoked!)

James it would be then, he decided finally. And perhaps an older and quainter spelling of the surname . . .

And Arthur Conan Doyle wrote:

". . . the incredible mystery of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world . . ."

—Marvin Kaye

ON SALE IN AMAZING-JULY

THE LONG FALL by **A. BERTRAM CHANDLER, SOCIAL BLUNDER** by **TOM GODWIN, SURVIVAL CHARACTERISTIC** by **CHARLES V. DE VET, ODDS** by **CHRISTOPHER ANVIL, NOBODY HOME** by **F.M. BUSBY, SPECTATOR SPORT** by **STEVEN UTLEY.**

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Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP: QUIXOTE WITH A PEN

A Guest Article by LIN CARTER

BACK IN 1950 a small publishing house called Gnome Press, which specialized in reprinting fantasy and science fiction from the pulp magazines, and which operated out of Hicksville, N.Y., began printing a series of hard-cover editions made up of Robert E. Howard's famous Conan stories which had originally appeared in the old *Weird Tales*, mostly during the 1930's.

The man behind the Gnome Press imprint, an old-time fan and collector named Martin W. Greenberg, launched the series with an edition of "The Hour of the Dragon," the only full-length novel about Conan which Howard ever wrote.

Greenberg retitled the novel *Conan the Conqueror* in order to capitalize on the magic of that character's name. In due course a reviewer's copy was dispatched to Fletcher Pratt. Pratt, a waspish-tempered, dimunitive man with a wispy, straggling beard, owlishly-thick eyeglasses, and a taste for plaid shirts of the most excruciating loudness, give the book short shift. Although fond of the Icelandic sagas and the romances of William Morris, and enthralled by the word-witchery of Dunsany and the ringing Tudor gusto of Edison, Pratt had little patience for the muscle-bound hero who could only batter his way out of sticky predicaments, relying on beef and brawn rather than brains. Pratt handed the book to his friend, colleague and collaborator, L. Sprague de Camp, with some casual remark to the effect that here, perhaps, was something he might find amusing.

De Camp was then, as he is now, a tall, lean, distinguished-looking man with piercing black eyes, a stiff, military manner, and short, neatly-trimmed dark hair (his short, neatly-trimmed Van Dyke beard he added to the ensemble later). Then he was forty-three years old and had been writing fantasy or science fiction stories for the pulp magazines for thir-

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teen years, and was the author of some ten books. His first published story was "The Isolinguals" in John W. Campbell's *Astounding Stories* for September, 1937; his first book was a non-fiction item called *Inventions and Their Management,* done in collaboration with Alf K. Berle and published by the International Textbook Company in Scranton, Pa., in 1937.

Pratt was a war-gamer before the term had scarcely even been coined, and conducted elaborate naval war-games complete with carefully detailed, whittled-out models of warships. These games, which sometimes drew as many as fifty participants, were played out on the floor of Pratt's apartment in Manhattan. In 1939 de Camp's old friend John D. Clark, Ph.D. (they had been college roommates at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, Cal., from which de Camp took a Bachelor of Science degree in aeronautical engineering in 1930) introduced de Camp into Pratt's war-gaming circle, and, of course, to Pratt himself.

They hit it off, despite the many differences between them of age (Pratt was de Camp's senior by ten years), background (Pratt was the son of an upstate New York farmer, born on an Indian reservation near Buffalo; de Camp came from an old family of certain social pretensions, and had a more-or-less aristocratic upbringing), experience (Pratt had been a prizefighter, flyweight class, reporter on two newspapers, and held down a desk in one of those semi-legit "writers' institutes" which, for a fee, guarantee to turn every would-be wordsmith into another Wordsworth; de Camp held a number of advertising agency and industrial public relations jobs before settling down to free-lancing full-time), education (Pratt never got past his freshman year at Hobart College at Lake Seneca, N.Y.; beside de Camp's B.S. in Aeronautical Engineering, he also took a Masters in Engineering and Economics from Stevens Institute of Technology, and studied at M.I.T.), temperament (Pratt was famous for flying off the handle and had a vitriolic gift for invective besides a furious temper; de Camp is always the suave, courtly gentleman and I have never seen him even slightly ruffled), and height (Pratt stood five feet three inches; de Camp tops six feet and looks even taller, with his habitual ramrod-stiff military bearing).

De Camp, a hearty naval buff, joined in the war-games; and before very long, he and Pratt joined in a close literary partnership which made their dual byline one of the delights of fantasy-buffs from the 1940's on. That same year they first met, 1939, John Campbell launched a new magazine called *Unknown* which was to specialize in fantasy, but not just the fairly routine swashbucklement which had made Howard famous in the pages of *Weird Tales*; fantasy that was written with intelligence, not merely with verve, wit, not just the occasional pratfall, modern literary style, not the old, adjectival guff.

Responding to Campbell's challenge for new, thought-provoking, original ideas in fantasy, Pratt cooked up a notion for a sequence of novelettes about a snooty, self-important young psychologist whose experiments with symbolic logic catapult him and his friends into a variety of alternate world-lines "where magic works, and the gods are real." In particular, these worlds would be imaginary worlds, drawn either from legend, i.e., the world of Norse mythology, or from literature, i.e., Ariosto, Spenser, Col-

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eridge & Co.

The first fruit of their efforts, "The Roaring Trumpet," took their itinerant psychologist, Harold Shea, into the above-mentioned world of the sagas and the Eddas. It appeared in the May, 1940 issue of *Unknown*, and the readers loved it. They loved even more "The Mathematics of Magic" in the August, 1940 issue, when Harold and his pals ventured into the universe of *The Faerie Queene*. The following year, in a short novel called *The Castle of Iron*, my personal favorite of this series, Shea wandered into the chivalric cosmos of Ariostos's Italian verse romance, *Orlando Furioso*. The acclaim for this series was truly remarkable. Even more remarkable, before the ink was dry on that issue the staid, very legitimate (and literary) publishing house of Henry Holt issued the first two Harold Shea stories in book form under the title of *The Incomplete Enchanter*.

Nowadays it is not at all unusual for a science fiction novel or magazine serial to appear in the dignity of hardcovers after its initial baptism of printer's ink on pulp pages. But in 1941 this was unheard of: I cannot think of a single fantasy or science fiction novel or collection of stories which traversed the enormous gulf then separating the science fiction pulp magazine world from the prestigious world of hardbound book publishing before *The Incomplete Enchanter*. The scientific romances of Wells, Verne, Burroughs, Merritt and Cummings had been translated to book form earlier, of course, but with the single and only exception of *The Master Mind of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, which had been reprinted from *Amazing Stories Annual* of 1927, those others who had bridged the gap were taken from the loftier adventure pulps, *Argosy* and *Blue Book* and the like, not from the lowly and despised sf magazines, with their gaudy cover art and flamboyant titles in which a blatant adjective—Weird, Astounding, Thrilling, Startling, Amazing, Fantastic—played so prominent a role in the largest possible lettering style. Only Burroughs did it earlier than they: and his novel appeared in *Amazing* only because it had already been rejected by everyone else.

Several things helped make the Harold Shea stories such a success with the readership of *Unknown*. In the first place, the stories were well-written in a neat, trim, modern prose that neither dripped with prose poetry, *a la* Merritt, nor with spooky adjectives, as with Lovecraft, nor weltered in reeking gore as was the case with Howard and his earlier imitators. The prose—as *prose*—was good, tight, decent modern journalism prose. It was not hokey. It did not rant and rave, clamoring to pile marvel upon marvel, massacre on top of massacre. Then again, there was the novelty of the background and of the situation: once precipitated in the world of Ariosto or Spenser, Shea had to learn the laws of magic in order to cope with more occultly-gifted adversaries, whereas a hero of Conan's breed would simply bash and bludgeon his way out of tight spots by brute force. Then again, there was the matter of characterization: Harold Shea was really a character, not just something cut from cardboard. Sure, he was the hero, but heroes in most fantastic romances before *The Incomplete Enchanter* were either indomitable physical supermen like Conan and Tarzan, or just natural-born master-swordsmen, like John Carter of Mars, who could hold twenty rampaging Tharks at swordpoint simultaneously.

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Shea was no Hercules or D'Artagnan, but an ordinary bloke: a flashy dresser, a bit of a fop, brash, conceited, known on occasion to affect a phoney British accent, a remarkably unsuccessfull man with the ladies, and not even particularly good-looking. In all, a most decidedly *un*heroic hero!

The success of these early stories, and of the other Shea stories, "The Green Magician" and "The Wall of Serpents," and of the further novels and stories Pratt and de Camp collaborated upon, such as *Land of Unreason* (Unknown, Oct., 1941), and *The Carnelian Cube* (Gnome Press, 1948), were a tremendous impetus for de Camp's career. He had only had seventeen stories published by the time he and Pratt pooled their talents on the first Harold Shea yarn, whereas Pratt was an old hand at the game and had been selling science fiction since 1929. I suspect Sprague learned quite a bit from Fletcher during their period of collaboration: the early or pre-Prattesque stories of de Camp's had been clever enough, but unmemorable: cute, but not trophy-winners. Only in one story, the celebrated *Last Darkness Fall (Unknown,* Dec. 1939), which de Camp was working up during his first year's acquaintence with Pratt but in the making of which Pratt played absolutely no part whatsoever, is it possible to discern something of de Camp's future excellence. Indeed, that novel, in which a modern American ordinary man is accidentally precipitated back into history, to Rome during the twilight age of the Gothic occupation, displays one of de Camp's primary interests: the minor nooks and crannies of history.

De Camp himself credits Fletcher Pratt with having exerted a powerful shaping influence on the development of his style—as emphatic an influence, he acknowledges, as that of John Campbell himself, the most exacting, as he was the most excellent, of editors. But de Camp's fiction, on the whole, demonstrates another faculty gained neither from Pratt nor from Campbell, and that is *humor*, which both of de Camp's literary gurus doubtless possessed in their private social lives, but for which their literary productions are not particularly noted. De Camp's keen appreciation of the ridiculous element in human affairs is probably innate and unlearned; his employment of it in his fiction, however, perhaps derives from his fondness for the fictional hilarities of P. G. Wodehouse and Thorne Smith. From the first writer he may have learned how to bring out the humorous fraities and failings of his characters purely through their dialogue, while the second writer probably served as a model for farcical action of the pratfall and funny-predicament sort.

Like every other writer worth his salt, de Camp was sharp enough to learn from his betters, and honest enough to admit to the fact.

WHEN Pratt tossed that historic copy of *Conan the Conqueror* into his colleague's lap, he started something that, even now, is not yet finished. De Camp read, and yielded helplessly to Howard's gusto and driving narrative energies. He had never before read any of Howard's stories that he can recall, although he was certainly around while they were being published in *Weird Tales*. The reason for this, simply, is that he had never read an issue of *Weird Tales*.

How any red-blooded reader of omnivorous taste and strong inclinations towards fantastica could possibly

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have avoided snatching up the monthly *Weird Tales* during the decade of the 1930's seemed to me, when Sprague first confessed his failure to ever have done so, thoroughly inexplicable. He offers the explanation, I would say the remarkably feeble explanation, that he had for some reason gotten the notion that *Weird Tales* was a magazine devoted wholly to ghost stories, and as he had always been immune to the theoretical fascination exerted by the macabre, he passed it by, notwithstanding those luscious Margaret Brundage covers which adorned the prince of pulps during its most legendary decade.

It also baffled me that de Camp's friends, like John D. Clark, and colleagues, like P. Schuyler Miller—both of whom collaborated on an "informal biography" of Conan and were among the first and most devoted of Howard's fans—never tipped Sprague off to the good stuff he was missing every month in *WT*. I asked Doc Clark about this and he points out that when he and de Camp were college roommates, Howard had not yet gotten published, and that later on when his Kull and Conan and Kane stories were the rage of *Weird*'s readership, de Camp was off in Scranton or somewhere, and Clark buried away in upstate New York, and they just were not that closely in touch.

At any rate, once introduced to the magic of Howard, de Camp made up for lost time by reading everything by Howard he could obtain, and when Donald A. Wollheim published a previously unknown Howard story in his *Avon Fantasy Reader* not long thereafter, de Camp tracked down its source—a trove of forgotten manuscripts left in the hands of Otis Adelbert Kline, Howard's agent, at Howard's death. Among these papers were some previously unknown (and some unfinished) Conan stories. De Camp got permission to complete them, and began hunting down other similar caches of unpublished manuscripts rumored to exist. The rest is history.

A year later, de Camp tried his hand at some Howardian heroica, in a novella called *The Tritonian Ring*. It appeared in the Winter, 1951 issue of *Two Complete Science-Adventure Books*. Although hampered by one of the ghastliest titles any magazine ever labored under, *TCSAB* coaxed some remarkably good novels out of some remarkably good writers like de Camp, James Blish and Arthur C. Clarke. For his *Tritonian Ring*, Sprague concocted an elaborately-invented world *a la* Howard's Hyborian Age: but, where Howard's imaginative integrity, or forethought, or something, lapsed, leading him into gross errors of taste in the devisal of pseudo-geography, de Camp took the patient care and had the expertise to do the thing right. *The Tritonian Ring* is laid in a post-Atlantean era, "the Pusadian Age," like Conan's world in general, but far more cleverly and thoroughly done.

The novel was followed by a number of Pusadian Age short stories, such as "The Eye of Tandyla" (1951), "The Stronger Spell" (1953), "Ka the Apalling" (1958), and so on. Twayne published a hardcover edition of the novel and the first three Pusadian stories in 1953. The cycle is not yet finished: I coaxed a new Pusadian yarn from de Camp as recently as 1971 (see "The Rug and the Bull" in *Flashing Swords!* #2).

But even in *The Tritonian Ring*, where his literary model, clearly and obviously, was Howard, de Camp's sense of the ridiculous in human doings insists on rising into view despite

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his determined efforts to squelch it. The characters are all faintly comical: the hero, Vakar of Lorsk, albeit bound on a world-saving quest, has sufficient leisure to debate philosopy and fool around with women; Queen Porfira, like Catherine the Great, views healthy specimens of masculinity who visit her realm primarily as potential bedmates; even magicians, both of the benign sort and of more proper villainy, tend to be amusingly grumpy or forgetful, or both. In subsequent fantasy novels, like *The Goblin Tower* (Pyramid, 1968), *The Clocks of Iraz* (1971), and especially in *The Fallible Fiend* (Signet, 1973), his knack for humor, or his inability to resist the humor in a situation or a character, comes more fully to the fore. In *Fiend*, for example, the fact that the narrative is told from the viewpoint of a genuine demon trapped on the human plane and forced to observe human behavior at close range, gives de Camp a perfect position from which to score the foibles and inanities of his fellow men.

De Camp is too sane and civilized to really *believe* in heroes *per se*. He knows enough about history to realize that too often the heroes of this world, from Richard Francis Burton to Lawrence of Arabia, act in what seems to observers as a heroic manner because of inner weakenesses, compulsions, or desperate needs to over-compensate for what they dread is cowardice or less than complete masculinity. Knowing this, he finds it difficult to create fictional heroes who do not suffer from *something* which serves to goad them into acting like heroes—incurable gas-pains, post-nasal drip, deviated septums, or a galloping mother-fixation, let us say.

He is also, I suspect, too sane and civilized to be able to swallow such pretty notions as patriotism, saintliness, nobility, without their leaving a bad taste in his mouth. Puritanism can be a mask for perversion; saintliness has been known to stem from the most masochistic motives; and patriotism, like politics, is more than occasionally a comfy and remunerative refuge for scoundrels.

De Camp is gifted with the clarity of vision that is more often a curse than a blessing, and which enables one to see with uncomfortably keen detail the realities, often sordid, frequently venal, behind patriotic flag-waving, political sloganeering, and the call to crusading zeal which often masks cynicism, corruption, greed and the naked lust for power. He sees as clearly as ever did Voltaire or, for that matter, Socrates, that men invariably act from the most base and ignoble of motives—while loudly proclaiming their nobility of purpose and purity of character.

But he is no crusader against pomposities and inanities, however obvious they are to him. Don Quixote imagined the windmills were hostile and monstrous giants, therefore the born enemies of man; he so firmly accepted his own delusion as truth that he charged those same windmills, armed only with a spear, ready to give his life in battle supporting his own delusions.

De Camp has no delusions, or, if he has them at all, he has only those few which men need in order to permit their existence to continue in the face of the ultimate futility of all existence. He sees the men around him as inexplicable beings, acting from sordid and selfish motives all too blatantly venal and silly, convincing themselves that they believe in the most transparent hoaxes and hocus-pokus. However swinish, they seem

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to him irresistibly comic. The ignorance and superstition and vapid biases to which they cling tickles his funnybone, whereas, in another, it might arouse fury or loathing.

Voltaire laughed at humanity; Cabell saw human endeavors as pricelessly ironic; de Camp belongs with that company, and is one with them and with Rabelais, Aristophanes, Lucian and Apuleius, who saw humanity as raw material for comedy. The other end of this spectrum is the writer such as Swift, who saw humanity as bestial but was too incensed at man's folly and blindness and ignorance to see anything remotely funny about it.

Swift wrote with savagery. He would have killed the object of his rage, if he could, like Quixote with the lance. But such as Voltaire and Cabell and de Camp prefer a subtler instrument: the pen. As keen as any lancehead, the penpoint, and able to sting as sharply. But somehow or other, it is a more civilized weapon.

ALTHOUGH he has yet to win a Hugo, or a Nebula—to say nothing of a Pulitzer—de Camp enjoys his work, and works at it assiduously. At 69, he is hale and hearty, in excellent health, after a recent operation or two (for varicose veins and arthritis of the fingers).

A former Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve, who fought World War II from a desk in a research facility whose fellow-members included Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein, de Camp still rises at six a.m., still holds himself with the erect bearing of an officer treading a quarterdeck, or a corridor in the Pentagon. He enjoys a convivial martini before dinner, and smokes a pipe or two of evenings, but these remain his only known fleshly weaknesses except for the pleasures of connubial life (de Camp and his petite blond wife, Catherine, have two tall sons, Lyman and Gerald).

He is what most Sword & Sorcery writers ought to be, but only Dunsany and he actually were: he rides horseback, goes yachting, speaks several languages quite fluently (including a decent Swahili), knows a genuine maharajah. An inveterate globe-trotter, de Camp has seen the ruins of Carthage and jungle-lost Zimbabwe by moonlight, and was most recently a visitor to the Galapagoes. He even fences, although not, I understand, very expertly (he and John Clarke both tried out for the fencing team in college, and both failed to make the grade).

His fund of colorful anecdota about the far lands he has seen, the interesting people he has known, is delightful. De Camp is what most storytellers are not—a charming raconteur. Indeed, he does so many things so very well that he is, I suspect, the envy and despair of many of his fellow-writers less disciplined, less traveled, and less common-sensical about things in general. I, who tend to pry myself grudgingly from bed about noon—by which time Sprague has easily put in a full day's work at the typewriter—regard him at-times with incredulity. The way he takes care of himself, Sprague will still be going strong at ninety, by which point I, twenty-three years his junior, will probably have been a good ten years in a cigarette-smoker's grave.

His affable and generous nature is known to few of the many who know his wit. When I was a raw beginniner, toiling over my first Sword & Sorcery novel, *The Wizard of Lemuria*, he inquired, without my even hinting, if he might read it; he

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returned the manuscript with a five-page, single-spaced criticism, flawlessly pinpointing every mistake of grammar, spelling, internal logic and consistancy. Having taken my poor manuscript apart, he admitted having read it "with gusto." Years later, after I had completed a bookful of Howard's fragmentary King Kull stories Sprague thrilled, delighted and completely astonished me by diffidently asking if I would mind collaborating with him on some new Conan tales. I said 'yes' very quickly, before he could change his mind: to date we have probably written a quarter of a million words together, or a bit less. The process has been exasperating, enjoyable, exhilerating, and exhausting; but on that topic I will unburden myself in more detail at another time, when once he has entered that Fiddler's Green reserved for story-tellers and yarn-spinners, and is trading tall tales with Gulliver and Sinbad over a tankard of ale and a fragrant pipe.

As to his genuine and lasting importance as a fantasy writer, it is hard to appraise, for he is, happily, still with us and, of course, still writing. But some observations, however premature, can be made, even at this interim point in time. He was the first great popularizer of heroic fantasy, its most tireless and eloquent champion. He edited the very first anthology of Sword & Sorcery ever published—a book titled, with great aptness, *Swords and Sorcery* (Pyramid, 1963). He continued in this vein with *The Spell of Seven* (1965), *The Fantastic Swordsmen* (1967), and *Warlocks and Warriors* (1970), the last being the first anthology of heroic fantasy in hardcover. With four books to his credit thus far, he has edited more anthologies of literary swordsmanship and sorcery than anyone else.

Singlehandedly he has laid the foundations for all future scholarly studies of heroic fantasy in a voluminous series of articles, essays, memoires and reviews so immense by now that the articles which comprise *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers* are only a small portion of this body of work. In *Amra* and other magazines, both fan and pro, he has written knowledgeably and with wit and insight and appreciation concerning Howard, Smith, Pratt, Eddison, Lovecraft, Morris, Dunsany, Tolkien, Ball, Moore, Kuttner, Derleth, White, Hubbard, Mundy, Rohmer, Lamb, Moorcock, Barringer, and just about anybody else who had anything to do with the Sacred Genre, however peripherally.

His work on reviving interest in Robert E. Howard, in getting his work back into print again and before the public, in completing the unfinished manauscripts, in collaborating with myself or Bjorn Nyberg on new Howardian pastiches, is singularly important. He has performed for Howard the same splendid service that Derleth did for Lovecraft: writing him up, anthologizing him, keeping his work alive and his name before the readers. De Camp not only edited the latter Conan books for Gnome Press, but was instumental in getting them into paperback editions from Lancer.

For this alone, de Camp has earned the gratitude and esteem of all fantasy buffs the world over. Derleth, at least, *knew* Lovecraft, corresponded with him, regarded him quite rightly and with good reason as his literary mentor. But de Camp never met Howard and never so much as exchanged a postcard with the man whose lifework he was to spend a quarter of a century getting into

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print. A more sincere and unselfish devotion to another man's work by a later writer I cannot call to mind.

But then there is the question of de Camp's own fiction. Just how good *is* it, and just how lasting? This is a difficult question to answer right now, although easy enough from the perspective of time: give me another twenty years post de Camp, and I guarantee an accurate estimate. (Hindsight is so easy in questions of literature, you know.)

I am persuaded that a goodly number of his novels and stories will survive the test of time, at least for awhile. Few—*very* few—writers are lucky enough, or gifted enough, to have their writings survive themselves by much more than a half century or so. Looking at those fantasy writers who died twenty or thirty or forty years ago, you see that such as Burroughs, Merritt, Lovecraft, Haggard, and Howard are still very much "alive." But writers of comparable worth, or nearly so, are flirting narrowly with oblivion. By how slim a margin—and for how long?—did the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series postpone extinction for Morris, Dunsany, Ernest Bramah and Hannes Bok? George Allen England and John Taine, to say nothing of Clifford Ball or Nictzin Dyalhis, are forgotten, except by a few buffs; neither Ball nor Dyalhis have received book publication.

When it comes to de Camp, any guess as to the lastingness of his work must essentially be a based on personal preference. But some informed estimates may be put forth. I should hazard the opinion that his non-fiction study of the Atlantis theme, *Lost Continents*, has a strong claim to permanence, not only because it is written with zest and wit, but because the scholarship is exhaustive and impeccable. For those reasons, and because no comparably comprehensive study of this field has ever been written, it should become a standard reference work, and should remain deservedly popular. I have much the same opinion concerning *The Ancient Engineers*. De Camp has a rare gift for making scholarly writing entertaining to read, and enjoyable.

Of his work with Pratt, surely *The Castle of Iron*, at very least, will last during our time. It is the strongest and the most thoroughly exemplary of their collaborations, while the other works are more or less flawed in one way or another, and reveal their pulpish origins all too plainly.

While even the best of de Camp's science fiction now seems dated, even *Divide and Rule*, the more purely entertaining of the Krishna stories have the timeless appeal of good, vivid storytelling. *The Tower of Zanid* (1958) should continue to find its way into the hands of new generations without difficulty. *Lest Darkness Fall*, his first novel, still about his best, is so completely original, refreshing and entertaining, that I cannot imagine its being easily forgotten. Of the Pusâdian stories, "Ka the Apalling" and "The Eye of Tandyla" can be endlessly anthologized over and over as long as a sufficient readership exists to encourage the publication of fantasy. *The Goblin Tower* seems to me the most perfect of his Sword & Sorcery novels. But these are merely personal preferences: time, as always, will have the last word in these matters.

As a writer of heroic fantasy, L. Sprague de Camp brought a unique personal talent for injecting humor into even the most serious plots of quest and war and adventure, and a delightful whimsical irreverence to

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the creation of heroes, heroines and villains. The best of his prose is so cleanly written, so well constructed, that for it to ever seem quaint or outmoded is difficult to imagine. To the craft of world-inventing he brought several ingenious and insightful new techniques: no writer I can think of before him quite so thoroughly realized that preliterate people, such as generally inhabit fantasy worlds, will quote from apothegms, tales and legends in lieu of the written word. For superior use of this device, see in particular the *Zanid*. And no writer before him who dealt with imaginary prehistoric ages had so thoughtfully and carefully and intelligently constructed his invented milieux—certainly not Howard or any of the Atlantis novelists.

Among fantasy writers he stands out virtually alone as being devoid of annoying eccentricities of taste or invention. It is possible to enthuse over Morris, Eddison, Lovecraft, Howard, Merritt or Smith, while admitting serious flaws in their command of the narrative art. I do not think it is possible to do that with de Camp. He wrote purely to entertain, not to convert or crusade or complain. Behind his choice of the literary craft lies no neurotic compulsion, lurks no guilty fears as to his lack of masculine machismo, whimpers no inferiorty complex's hunger for attention. Quite early on he saw where his best abilities lay, and pursued perfection in his craft from that moment.

Somewhere in the qualities listed in the paragraph above may be found the secret of his greatness in our field. Perhaps in all of them..

—LIN CARTER

La Fin D'Une-Monde (cont. from page 66)

beyond even memory. What you offer, I can find in myself, it is in every one of us. And in J. Perhaps in her more than most.

Which, I suddenly realised, was why I was here, the reason for my participation in the project. I had abandoned myself, I thought, to the clear fluid of life, following where it led, a stick on a stream. But now the name of the country, of the language came to me. And I knew that reason lurks, a dark, unforgiving thing, in dark, unforgiving bushes, behind everything we do. Even when we believed reason was destroyed. An unsettling thought.

I reached towards the mask.

That is not allowed, she said.

In art, I said, all is allowed.

I pulled it down. It hung, an ineffective, pitiful noose, about her throat.

Insert (write later, 30-50 words, description, what I saw: J's face, impossibly old).

I turned away. I could not accept what I saw there. The pain, the ravage. It moved within me, like the beginning of a new word.

And so I walked away then from that grave, from that place and time (though there was no time), from the femme-chose I once loved, representative of the two oldest professions,

And I came at last onto a green field beyond which I could see the small settlement.

Like (I saw for the first time) a natural thing, a growing thing, alive,

And the vast empty spaces around.

They come no more at night.

I watch J's face in the moonlight.

The book is almost finished.

—JAMES SALLIS

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fantasy books

Reviewed by Fritz Leiber

CURIOUS FRAGMENTS: JACK LONDON'S TALES OF FANTASY FICTION, edited by Dale L. Walker, Kennkat Press, 1975, $12.95, 233 pages.

Including science-fiction stories such as "The Scarlet Plague," "The Red One," and "The Shadow and the Flash," this excellent collection proves how deeply London was into SF and fantasy. He was planning a story of traveling planets when he died. Fifteen stories. Nice foreword by P. J. Farmer, and introduction by the editor.

THE SPACE VAMPIRES, by Colin Wilson, Random House, 1976, $7.95, 214 pages.

In his first phase, Wilson was the first British beatnik philosopher, writing *The Outsider* and *The Strength to Dream*, where he said Lovecraft had the imagination of a mass-murderer. Then came various novels about mass-murderers and *The Mind Parasites*, a Lovecraftian novel published by Arkham House. Now he's into science fiction with an interplanetary somewhat indebted to Van Vogt's tale of high-IQ vampires in space, "Asylum." Strange!

ALTERNATE WORLDS: The Illustrated History of Science Fiction, by James Gunn, Prentice Hall, 1975, $29.95, 256 pages.

A massive book which effectively relates the rise of science fiction with the working out of the industrial revolution and the coming of cheap power and mass magazines. Profusely illustrated with pictures of writers and book-illustrations in black-and-white and a blushing sepia and with numerous color reproductions of SF magazine covers with an allover brownish tinge. A good treatment of Poe (who influenced Verne more than I'd realized) and of Verne and H.G. Wells. The fullest history of the American SF magazines I've seen. An impressive compendium.

FAR LANDS OTHER DAYS, by E. Hoffmann Price, Carcosa, 1975, $15, 587 pages.

A *very* massive book, enshrining a veterans' veteran's tales of the Near East written for *Weird Tales*, *Argosy*, *Speed* and *Spicy Mystery Stories*, and *Spicy Adventure Stories*: "Hussayn, the auctioneer, whisked the mantle from the girl's shoulders, leaving her clad only in her unbound hair. It trailed to her hips, a red-gold veil that almost hid her white breasts—though their roundness was kissed by the late afternoon light that lanced past the minarets of the El Azhar Mosque. She was too proud to shrink from the eyes and hands that would go over her loveliness as though she were a horse put through its paces." Thirty-one stories, some with as many

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as nine chapters (Stories with chapter titles! Hell, they don't even have novels with titled chapters any more!) and more than that many full-page illustrations by George Evans that bring back the pulps at their dashingest.

In his forword Price says he always knew he'd be "a traveller in far-off lands where I'd find novel foods, unusual liquor, and exquisite strange women" and that, "To write, one had to know how to handle horse and sword and pistol." That's the old swashbuckling spirit, by God!

SELECTED LETTERS IV 1932–1934, by H. P. Lovecraft, edited by August Derleth and James Turner, Arkham House, 1976, $12.50. 456 pages.

This penultimate volume is every bit the equal of the first three. Arkham's new editor has written an excellent preface and has illustrated the book with photographs of Lovecraft's correspondents *as they were at the time* (a nice touch!) even the "veterans' veteran," E. H. Price, poised at typewriter in dressing robe and silken Chinese skullcap, sipping wine and fondling a briar pipe. In those years HPL was writing a lot to Robert E. Howard, Price, J. Vernon Shea, Clark Ashton Smith, and to Clark's friend Helen V. Sully.

HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT: DREAMER ON THE NIGHT SIDE, by Frank Belknap Long, Arkham House, 1975, $8.50, 251 pages.

A nice enough volume in its way, but Long has had no new thoughts on Lovecraft and has chosen to restrict his published recollections of the man to 3 or 4 anecdotes. Too bad!—when they were closely associated for many years, Lovecraft visited the Longs many times, and they even ran an editorial service together. Maybe someone interviewing Long could get the story.

SELECTED LETTERS V 1934-1937, by H. P. Lovecraft, edited by August Derleth and James Turner, Arkham House, 1976, $12.50, 437 pages.

This final volume, triumphant climax of Arkham's most ambitious publishing project, finds the Old Gentleman corresponding extensively with young and would-be writers—Catherine L. Moore, Henry Kuttner, Emil Petaja, Willis Conover, etc.—but he does not neglect old writing comrades and friends. With the Great Depression at its height, politics, economics, and his own dwindling resources take up more of his attention (as Turner points out in his thoughtful introduction) but to the very end the arts predominate. His last super-long letter to his old friend James F. Morton (museum curator and fellow enthusiast for genealogy and architecture) unfinished at the time of his death and found among his effects, breaks off in the midst of long discussions of surreal art (Dali's "Wet Watches," his favorite eerie Asian paintings by Nicholas Roerich, etc.), the last two films he saw, *Winterset* and the Reinhardt *Midsummer Night's Dream* (he enjoyed and praised them both), and a new life of Poe's rival Thomas Hollay Chivers, whom he credits with "a rich cosmic imagination."

I have a strong personal interest in this volume because it includes his letters to myself and my late wife Jonquil, as generously excerpted by Derleth thirty years ago. These began in early November 1936 and ended in late January 1937 and so were confined to only three months, a shorter period than I'd realized. I am struck by how, although desperately pressed for time and energy, he continued to write to us separately and as distinct individuals, and by the amount of exhuberant living we all three managed to cram into that trimonth: my wife was writing to book dealers and publishers about Lovecraft, I was planning a revision (later abandoned) of "Adept's Gambit" to include

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Cthulhu-Mythos elements, we talked of starting a literary fantasy magazine, and I conceived and executed my splatter-stencil illustrations of his "The Whisperer in Darkness" in time for him to see and approve of them. In fact the unfinished Morton letter contains a page or more about them and "Adept's Gambit" and the Fafhrd-Mouser cycle and the contribution to it of Harry O. Fischer, whose long late-February letter from the dying writer also appears in excerpts and who'd almost died himself in the January Ohio floods (he wrote about them brilliantly).

In parting I can't resist (recalling Price) quoting Lovecraft's own comments on the accomplishments of the gentleman (and so presumably the gentleman-writer): "A gentleman ought to play (or have play'd) chess, just as he must fence and ride (I didn't get around to those, except with wooden swords and on a bike, so I ain't no gent)."

THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER, a novel of suspense by Ramsey Campbell, Bobbs-Merrill (reviewed from galleys)

As in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, the evil that springs from innocence is the theme of this novel of psychopathology set in a modern England as pungently real as toad-in-the-hole. Over the entire book lies the shadow of a power-motivated and warp-minded Satanist and the monstrous birth he induced. His mysterious past actions—and a nasty book he wrote—enmesh and threaten to entrap an interesting assortment of characters: a pretty, young schoolteacher who's convinced she's ungainly, a self-infatuated writer who likes to push other people's buttons, the middle-aged proprietor of a decayed movie theater, and a young hippy who is at once naive and shocking.

Campbell catches the odd colors of individual inner awareness and the prankish flow of life in seemingly drab people as few other English writers can. We sympathize with his characters because he gives us the subtlest rhythms of their lives—it's as if we were locked in a closet with each of them in turn—an unnerving experience, yet one with an unholy fascination.

He brings the slums of Liverpool to life in a way that is at once beautiful, shocking—and thoroughly terrifying. We not only see and hear, we smell and feel—the acid stench and spider touch of fear.

THE HEIGHT OF THE SCREAM, by Ramsey Campbell, Arkham House, 1976, $7.50, 229 pages.

Campbell's career in this country has been closely associated with Arkham, Derleth, and Lovecraft, beginning with a precocious talent for writing Cthulhu Mythos tales. Growing up in the hip Liverpool of the Beatles and greatly fascinated by horror movies, he rather early realized the unconscious sexual references in much horror-writing, including his own, and has tried to come to grips with it honestly. The result is a very sensory, highly subjective, thick-textured species of horror story from which the cosmic element, so important to Lovecraft, has been pretty well eliminated. By the cosmic element I mean speculation about scientific law and its possible suspension in individual cases, a sense of weird far-off wonders lurking, human fate and history, and the whole question of, "Can such things be?" Campbell is rather concerned with the intensely private life of individuals, the cinematic flow of their raw sensations, and not with the question "Is this really happening or are they just imaginging it? Is psychosis taking over?" Within these limits the stories are excellent. Campbell is very good with words in a vivid animistic way. Consider these, of rain: "The flowing arrow-headed ripples in the gutter accompanied them into Church Street. The drench-

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ing gusts raised goose-pimples on the cars and herded the pedestrians into shop doorways to choke on the stench of raincoats. A soaking dog . . ."

FRIGHTS: New Stories of Suspense and Supernatural Terror, edited by Kirby McCauley, St. Martin's Press, 1976, $8.95, 293 pages.

To give the reader some really eerie shivers without using stock weird figures such as the werewolf, vampire, and devil and without employing wanton violence and grue—those are the standards this anthology of originals aims at and achieves to a satisfying degree. True, there are several ghosts, but they can hardly be avoided—they're part of too general and universal a concept. And when a specific supernatural is invoked, at least it's exotic: a Gypsy curse, ancient Egyptian concepts of the soul, tree-magic and monstrousness in Vietnam. Violence, especially fire and blood, come into most of the stories, but by legitimate avenues. There's a long, beautiful story by Russell Kirk involving a situation I imagine most of us find delightful: a man desperately seeking shelter in a blizzard manages to enter a big old house and finds it delightfully furnished, well-stocked with food and firewood, in apple-pie order, and with no one else there or likely to come.

There are two very funny (but not just funny) stories by R. A. Lafferty and Davis Grubb (*Night of the Hunter*): the one a typical tissue of Oklahoma prodigies-piled-on-prodigies, the other a similar but dead-pan treatment of strange events in Appalachia near Clarksburg, West Virginia. Can a super-computer involve itself with the supernatural? See Joe Haldeman's tale. Also yarns by Gahan Wilson (one of his grotesque cartoons in prose), Brian Lumley, Poul and Karen Anderson, William F. Nolan, Ramsey Campbell (a beauty about a Ghost-Train ride in a Liverpool amusement park), David Drake, Dennis Etchison, Robert Aickman, John Jakes and Richard E. Peck, and Robert Bloch—and introduction by yours truly about the desirable symbiosis of wonder and terror.

THE ABSOLUTE AT LARGE, by Karel Capek, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1975, $11, 294 pages, selected by Lester del Rey (facsimile of the MacMillan edition of 1927)

This clever novel on the now-hackneyed theme of atomic energy is one of the many creations of the brilliant Czech writer between-world-wars, who gave us the word "robot" and the science-fiction classic *War With the Newts* (Berkley, 1976, $1.50, 241 pages. See Damon Knight's excellent review in *In Search of Wonder*.)

Capek's book, first published in English in 1927, is set in *its* future, 1943—incidentally a very accurate prediction of the actual date of the discovery of atomic energy. His special twist is that his "Karburator," invention of R. Marok, a Czech engineer, not only transforms matter into floods of energy which when applied overproduces the world into a standstill of abundances, but also releases essential spirituality (matter's binding force, it appears), the illimitable, the absolute—in short, God—into the world and *that* proves a thoroughgoing disaster. Persons living near Karburators begin to have visions and work miracles, their old religious convictions are revitalized, and pretty soon they are busy killing off their neighbors for the old Adamic reason that their absolute is different from his absolute.

Satire takes over completely with Catholic against Protestant, Buddhist against Christian, black against white, employers against workers, English against Irish, everybody against the Jews, and so on up and down the line. The senseless destruction of World War I was clearly very fresh in the author's memory. But no matter how great the holocaust, enough

(cont. on page 130)

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Editorial (cont. from page 4)
Hand-written manuscripts (and we do get a few) are automatically rejected. They're hard for us, the editors, to read and typesetters simply won't consider them. So the first move for anyone considering a career—even a part-time career—as a writer is to get a typewriter, or, failing that, find someone who will type your manuscripts for you.

We see a lot of oddly-typed manuscripts, of course. One of the most common errors amateurs make is to double-space between *words* instead of *lines*. And some like to use a ribbon years after all its ink was pounded out of it, producing a faint gray type more easily read with one's fingertips than one's eyes. Some typists leave almost no margins—top, bottom, or sides—on their pages, creating a hard-to-read manuscript (the lines are too wide to scan easily) and one which has no room on it for copyeditor's notations. If you want your story purchased for publication, you must make allowance for the fact that the copyeditor needs room for his notes to the typesetter, as well as for any minor changes he may feel the story needs.

I don't object to receiving a xerox of your manuscript instead of the original, but I *do* object to dirty xeroxes, or a xerox made from a carbon which is faint or blotchy. (The worst offenders in this respect are professional authors or their agents, who occasionally send me illegible xerox copies. One novel of a few years back had a streak of dirt three lines wide on *every page*—a defect in the copying machine, obviously—which made those lines affected almost impossible to read, so obscured were they.) What I am concerned with is *legibility*. The other night, after copyediting a rather faint xerox of a manuscript, I found myself with a splitting headache which seemed centered directly behind my eyes. It took minutes of therapy (including closing my eyes and letting them relax) to overcome the pain—after which I had to return to the remainder of the manuscript. I'll put up with this when I have to—i.e., when the story's a good one and no other copy is available—but when considering new submissions I'm naturally going to be prejudiced against a manuscript which is difficult to read easily.

So much for that aspect of submitting your story. If you need to learn the basic rules for manuscript-typing, I recommend you check your local library for handbooks on the subject.

Assuming you've produced a neatly-typed manuscript, what then? All that's left to do is to submit it to the magazine of your choice. (If you want to try an anthology-series being produced in book form, you'll have to know which are currently buying new stories, which requires subscribing to one of the market-related publications in our field, such as the Science Fiction Writers of America's *Bulletin*. Probably the best source of market news, however, is *Locus*, the sf newspaper, periodically reviewed in *The Clubhouse* in AMAZING.)

When submitting a story to a prospective market, it is standard form to include with your story a self-addressed, stamped envelope large enough and with sufficient postage to bring back your story in event of rejection. When submitting to FANTASTIC or AMAZING, you must also include a reading fee of 25¢ if you've never before been published. (Published authors are not required to pay this fee, which is in any event refundable if we accept your story.) Stories submitted to this magazine receive a *much faster* response if they are mailed to our Falls Church office—the address at the head of *According to You*—than if they go to New York.

Once you've mailed off your story you have nothing else to do except to wait anxiously by your mailbox for a response. The odds are that your story will come back—at least at first. Don't give up. Mail it out to another market and keep doing so until you've

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exhausted every market you can think of. Then retire it to a drawer somewhere and don't look at it for a year. Keep writing new stories. Keep submitting them. Retire each one if it doesn't sell. After you've done this for a year, take out the story you retired first and reread it. In a year's time and with newer stories under your belt, you'll find yourself much more objective about your old work. You'll perceive its flaws much more readily. And it may be that with the weight of your added experience as a writer you'll be able to correct the faults of the retired story and remarket it. But don't waste too much time trying to make successes out of failures. It's much easier to write a new and better story than it is to turn a bad story into a good one.

If you're determined to write and you have any talent for it, persistence is your best bet. Writing is a skill which can be learned, provided you have the underlying abilities and imagination. But learning is never easy and requires a lot of hard work on your part. David Ray says he's wanted to write sword & Sorcery stories since before he was twelve. If he applies himself to the task you may some day read one of his stories here.

SALES & CIRCULATION: For as long as there have been science fiction magazines and fantasy magazines, the latter have been outsold by the former. Why, I'm not too sure. The history of fantasy magazines in this country—*Weird Tales*, *Unknown*, *Beyond*, *Coven 13*, et al—is diverse in terms of both the nature of the stories published and their quality. Magazines like *Unknown* are regarded today as classics—nearly every story from *Unknown*'s pages has since been republished in book form. But perhaps because ours is a mechanistic, science-oriented culture (or at any rate was for most of this century) the sf magazines have always enjoyed better sales than the fantasy magazines. *Astounding* always outsold *Unknown*, for instance, leading their publisher to fold *Unknown*.

Since FANTASTIC was launched in 1952 it has been consistently outsold by its sister, AMAZING. This was true under Ziff-Davis, the magazine's first publisher, and it remains true under Ultimate Publications, the current publisher. (Oddly enough, at times in the past FANTASTIC's contents have been identical to AMAZING's—but even that didn't help, because it was always regarded by its audience as a fantasy magazine, perhaps because of its title.)

When I first became editor of this magazine, in 1968, the sales lagged from 3,000 to 5,000 copies an issue behind those of AMAZING. The same remains true today although I have devoted extra attention to this magazine for almost the whole of the eight years I have been its editor. There have been only a few exceptions to this Rule of Sales: those issues in which we published a Conan story. Conan has pulled our sales *above* AMAZING's. But only Conan. A stronger accent on sword & sorcery fantasies in the last few years has not been reflected by any improvement in sales.

I can't believe that this sales lag is due solely to the audience-response to fantasy, as opposed to the audience-response to science fiction. Fantasy has enjoyed a hugely healthy resurgence in the past decade or more, Tolkien and Conan emerging as twin leaders in this renaissance. Nor is our culture so determinedly materialistic and science-oriented these days—as my editorials on that subject of more than a year ago noted.

When I moved from New York City back to Virginia in 1970 I could find FANTASTIC on a few of the local newsstands which carried sf and fantasy magazines. By 1971 this was no longer the case. Although northern Virginia (the Washington, D.C. area) is large, prosperous and metropolitan in its cultural sophistication, I do not believe it is possible to purchase a

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copy of this magazine on any newsstand in the entire area. And I am aware of only a few outlets—major newsdealers, not drugstore magazine racks—in the city of Washington itself which put FANTASTIC on sale (usually with other digest-sized magazines on the bottom shelf in back, in an unordered stack). And this while AMAZING continues to be sold in drugstores (well, a few drugstores) throughout the area.

Our only competition, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, was not sold in this area from 1958 to 1974. In 1974 that magazine's editor and publisher, Ed Ferman, talked District News into handling *F&SF* more or less concurrently with the 1974 World SF Convention in Washington. For about a year it was possible to find *F&SF* on the same stands which carried AMAZING, *Galaxy/If* and *Analog*. Now if one relies on this method for finding copies of that magazine, one will miss at least two of every three issues.

It's my feeling that the bottleneck remains the distribution chain by which we try to get this magazine to you, our readers. Hostile as distributors are to all small-circulation magazines (that is, anything which sells less copies than, say, *TV Guide* or *Hustler*) and to sf magazines in particular, they appear to be even more hostile to any magazine which smacks of fantasy—a magazine, say, which uses that word in its title. FANTASTIC is the only all-fantasy magazine published today—and if my experiences in this area and your experiences as related to me in your letters mean anything at all, FANTASTIC is about the hardest magazine to *find* on sale, anywhere.

This is hurting us. It does me no good to put together an issue as exciting or as well-balanced in different types of fantasy as, say, this issue—if you never find it on sale anywhere.

So I'm asking your help.

There isn't a lot you, as an individual, can do. But if enough of you do something, your voices will be heard.

What would I like you to do? I'd like you to go to wherever you prefer to buy your magazines, and if you can't find FANTASTIC there any more—or miss some issues because it appears there only erratically—I'd like you to *ask* for it. Seek out whoever is in charge of that stand and ask them to carry FANTASTIC—every issue. Don't just ask once; ask on every occasion that you can. Be polite; point out that you are a regular customer and that you represent a sizable readership for fantasy. If the stand handles books too, point out that Tolkien has been a best-seller for years and that if more fantasy was available it would sell better. If you make this request frequently enough, sooner or later the proprietor of your stand will ask his wholesaler for copies (or more copies) of FANTASTIC. And if he asks often enough, his wholesaler might even ship them to him.

If finding copies is no problem in your area (and there *are* areas where FANTASTIC can be easily and regularly found—at least a few) you would be doing us all a great favor by showing your copies to your friends and getting them to become regular readers and purchasers of this magazine.

I don't know if this will, in the long run, be much help. But there is only one alternative to an improvement in our sales—and that is the death of this magazine. We cannot continue indefinitely with our present sluggish sales, which too often fall below the break-even point. We have reached the point where something must be done. With your help we may be able to turn the corner toward improved sales and consequently a healthier financial picture. If you're a regular reader of FANTASTIC and have enjoyed our unique mix of fantasy fiction and features, I know you want to see this magazine survive. This year is our twenty-fifth of continuous publication. It would be nice to reach thirty.

—TED WHITE

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Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According to You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046*

Dear Mr. White,

It was with great regret that I read of the death of Thomas Burnett Swann in the November FANTASTIC. I read his *Day of the Minotaur* in 1966 when it was first published by Ace, and in the next ten years, eagerly purchased every new book by Swann as soon as it came out. His worlds of Dryads, Satyrs and other pre-humans interacting with the world of men were always a delight, and the fantasy field has lost one of its finest and most unique writers.

The November FANTASTIC was one of the best in a long time. I think Dennis More has to be the top talent discovered by you. "The Forest of Andred" was in keeping with the two previous excellent stories of Felimid. "Black Moonlight" was another fine story, but then I can't think of any Lin Carter story that I haven't enjoyed. He has been one of my two favorite writers for a long time, the other being a certain series author you dislike, I think, because he presents a worldview sharply at odds with the currently prevailing one of women's lib and sexual equality.

The Brian Lumley story was also well done. This was the first time I read any of his work not connected with the Cthulhu mythos. Saberhagen's story was an interesting variation on the ancient Theseus myth. All in all, an issue that can be described as outstanding.

I regret that it was necessary for FANTASTIC to go quarterly, and very much hope this will not be a prelude to your disappearance from the marketplace. While I still disagree with you in regard to the much debated Gor saga, there is no question that FANTASTIC under your editorship has become the number one source for the publication of quality fantasy stories of any magazine.

DOUGLAS W. JUSTICE
2154 East Ridge Road
Rochester, N.Y. 14622

Dear Ted,

Saw your statement of distribution. Unless the publisher has a lot of relatives or is running the mags as a tax dodge, he has no reason to print three times as many copies as are normally sold.

—DAVID N. DELUDE
5 Brewster Road
Hingham, MA 02043

No, you're right. We could print only the number of copies we normally sell—and then sell one-third that number. We could also fold the magazine entirely; the effect would be about the same and probably cheaper in the latter case. The sad fact of the matter, David, is that publishers are forced to print twice to three times the

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number of copies they sell in order to sell the number they do sell. Check out the figures (required annually by the Postal Service) in any sf magazine. Subtract the subscription sales from the total number printed, and compare the remaining figure with that for newsstand sales. Even Analog, *the sales leader, sells only* half *the number of copies put on display on the newsstands.* Galaxy, F&SF, FANTASTIC *and* AMAZING *average about one-third. The same is true of most paperback publishers of sf: out of 60,000 copies printed, the average sale is about 20,000. The rest are supposed to be destroyed–pulped. Many are bootlegged through outlets which sell them with their covers torn off: these represent a total loss for the publisher. Why is this true? I blame the distribution system in this country—and for more on the subject see my editorial this issue.*—TW

Dear Mr. White:

I picked up the November issue of FANTASTIC about a week ago, and although I haven't had the opportunity to peruse the fiction, the features alone have inspired a loc.

First, I was disappointed in the entire letter section because there were no remarks for the May, 1976 issue. I was looking forward to it to see how readers would react to Karl Edward Wagner's Kane story, "Two Suns Setting". I was going to write when the May issue came out voicing my enthusiasm for the author and the story, but since I was so prejudiced in favor of both over all, I declined. Now I'm wondering if any comment was received at all! So, to rectify that, I think that the story was perhaps one of the best sword and sorcery novelets that the magazine has presented so far. Kane has a sense of humanness, and it is much to Wagner's credit for creating a character so alive. The story was vigorous and refreshing. I for one am tired of the same old stale plot, rubber-band powered flying machines, brass-braed princesses, evil wizards, and slimy monsters. It is rare these days, to find a writer with a new voice and new ideas, in a market flooded with the same rehashing of material and plots from Howard/Burroughs/Merritt, etc. Wagner's Kane has so much more to offer than that. And its *good*! I sincerely hope we'll get to see more soon.

There was a letter in the November issue from a Mr. Al Schroeder III, that I would like to respond to. He wrote, ". . . . Lin Carter's finishing of Clark Ashton Smith's 'The Stairs in the Crypt'—actually the reason I bought the issue. Despite my disliking of Carter's solo writings . . . he was very skillful in preserving that mood of Smith's—so much so that I am in some puzzlement as to where one ended and the other began." Lin Carter did not "finish" this story. I think it is time to disclose publically that these stories by Clark Ashton Smith and Lin Carter are not any more Smith, than the material credited to H.R. Lovecraft and August Derleth is Lovecraft. These stories are *not* in any stretch of the imagination, "post-humous collaborations". They are almost solely the product of Lin Carter and I think it is time that they were by-lined as such. Sure, Lin uses names invented by Smith, and some story titles, but it doesn't go much further than that! At times, he gets ahold of an unpublished version of a Smith story in manuscript, hoping to lift an unused sentence or phrase to lend credence to the current by-line. But, believe me, having read a typed transcribed version of Smith's notebook, *The Black Book*, there are *no* unfinished stories or plotgerms from which Lin has been deriving this material. Nor was there any indication that Smith intended to write further translations from *The Book of Eibon*, which most of these new stories seem to be adding to. Smith at least had sense enough to know that such profane lore was not

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exoteric! These stories should more rightly be presented as pastiche, based on names, places, etc. invented by Clark Ashton Smith. But not by Clark Ashton Smith *and* Lin Carter. That Mr. Schroeder finds the handling of the style "skillful in preserving the mood of Smith's", is fine. To my taste, I find the style forced and dry. Lin doesn't have Smith's sardonic sense of humor, or his cosmic point of view. To go as far as computing the length of Smith's sentences on an average, is stretching things a bit far for me. I am not against Lin writing these stories. As for his ability to imitate Smith's style, it *is* difficult, and he has come as close as he can in these imitations. But please, let's call them what they are, pastiche, and leave Clark Ashton Smith's good name only loosely associated with the material.

Lastly, I want to thank you for your editorial and eulogy for Thomas Burnett Swann. I too was deeply saddened by his death and its suddenness, knowing nothing of his terminal condition. I have long admired his writings. Swann's sensitivity and the pathos reflected in his characters are unlike anything else being written in the field. I'm sure his legacy in the fantasy genre will remain singular and especial to his growing numbers of fans and readers. The news of a new novel to be published by you, creates much anticipation here. I am eager to read it. If it can't be published soon (perhaps as a special memorial issue?), why not reprint some of his short fiction that only appeared in the British magazines? I'm sure that to most of us these would be "new" and very welcome.

Thank you for your time.

ANDREW SMITH
1354 Thornwood Pl. #A
Columbus, Ohio 43212

For some years, as you may be aware, we published a variety of reprinted stories here—most of them drawn from earlier issues of FANTASTIC *and its precursor,* FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. *Since we have abandoned that policy the publisher prefers that we publish no reprints of any kind.*—TW

Dear Ted,

Since 1974 the Gandalf Awards have been given out annually. This costs about $300 each year, and the price has been paid solely by Lin Carter. Perhaps it would be better if more people became involved in the annual balloting and awarding through contributions to an award fund and the election-of-a-Fantasy Hall of Fame for deceased fantasy writers.

If 700 fantasy fans contributed an average of $10 each; this would cover costs as the interest would come to about $350 each year. This group of members would thus qualify to elect a Hall of Fame (annual awards would continue to be a part of the Worldcon). This would eliminate the financial burden from Lin and help to insure that living, or recently deceased writers (say those dead less than five years) would win the Gandalf and the rest of the pantheon would receive recognition as well.

Don't send money now. Let's have some comment from Lin and other parties in the field of fantasy, *and fans.*

JOHN ROBINSON
1-101st St.
Troy, N.Y. 12180

With the sums of money Worldcons are handling these days $300 (or even $7,000) is something of a drop in the bucket. Wouldn't it be simpler to have the Worldcon take over the funding of these awards as it does the Hugos? Or, alternatively, should they be transferred to the new World Fantasy Convention, held annually in October? Certainly the idea merits further discussion. Lin, have you any preferences?—TW

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Dear Ted,

Lately, FANTASTIC had become less appealing to me. The stories seemed to parade about, like lost souls looking for a final retreat. I hated handing out a buck for the latest issue. But the November number was really very good.

Looking through the magazine, at first, I wasn't too sure it was such a good deal. Let's see, there was one mythological fantasy, three sword-n-sorcery tales, one contemprary fantasy, and a variety of features. "The White Bull" was a problem. I was very reluctant to begin reading it, because it had been my previous pleasure to read a vintage *Unknown* serial, "The Reign of Wizardry", by Jack Williamson, and I feared these two stories would clash and disembowel each other. Obviously the stories cannot be read as companion pieces, since Jack added many new things to the mythical setting. However, Fred Saberhagen managed to write an individual story that stood up well in comparison to the novel.

You may notice that I refer to the Thurston story as a contemporary fantasy. I know many people have varied opinions on what fantasy is, and if there is such a thing as contemporary fantasy, but I define it as a story which explores the relationships between people and things and does so in an unusual manner or in a fantastical setting. Generally, I don't read these stories, since I find them poorly written. But this one was excellent. I think, in all honesty, you'll have to admit that this story could have easily fitted into AMAZING or *Galaxy* in regards to its scientific, though soft core, content. Maybe you won't agree, but the Mellophonic Orchillusia gave the story a scientific element.

Ugh, latter day Conans. Perhaps I'm being too hasty in my evaluation of Lumley and Carter, perhaps I should just disregard them. But really, Thongor and Tharquest! I just can't take these barbarian ballets anymore. The plotline is always the same: 1) barbarian, 2) girl and/or angry god, 3) barbarian gets in trouble, 4) barbarian gets out of trouble, 5) off the barbarian goes to find more girls or anger more gods. I just can't take it, anymore. This part of the fantasy field has so much writers fail to look at. One thing I want to see is a story wherein the conquering scourge loses. And I mean really lose. Somewhere out there, there has to be a writer who could write an effective, compassionate story where the hero gambles and eventually pays the ultimate price of death. I'll be waiting.

What's this? A hero in a sword-n-sorcery tale, who dares to be different from Conan! At last! Felimid is a great alternative to the overflowing mass production of Conans. Whereas Conan roars, Felimid sings. And we don't have to wade through a lecture on how fantastic it is to walk around with muscles bulging out.

C. G. FUTCH
3302 Wisconsin Ave.
Tampa, Florida 33611

Dear Ted,

L. Sprague de Camp's article "White Wizard in Tweeds," in the November 1976 issue of FANTASTIC, was a great pleasure to read. His scholarship is remarkable and fascinating. I have a couple of points to make about his remarks which may be of general interest.

Tolkien was a leading expert on *Beowulf*, the early masterpiece of Old English epic poetry. In it are many of the elements de Camp finds in *The Lord of the Rings*, including the ambiguous mixture of Christian theology and Nordic mythological cynicism. Even the prototype dragon typical of Smaug may be found in *Beowulf*. Tolkien's article, "Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics," (which de Camp mentions on page 74) is still regarded as an important work in the Study of *Beowulf*, and is a standard reference

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for scholars.

Hence, the source of the word "orc" as the Elvish word for goblin seems likely to derive from *orcneas* (line 112 of *Beowulf* in the version edited by F. Klaeber, first published in 1922, and last revised in 1950), a word roughly translating into "evil spirit" or "monster." Scholars are not sure of the exact nature of the *orcneas*, an ambiguity ideal for Tolkien's purposes. Several versions of the word show it as *orc-neas;* the word *orc* used as a prefix (not to be confused with a similarly spelled word, *orc,* which means "cup"). It is a small step from the evil spirit or monster *orc-neas* to the Elvish orc, which is more consistent with Tolkien's use of ancient northern European languages than is the Latin *orcus* suggested by de Camp (page 81).

The word "ent" is also found in Beowulf (Klaeber, lines 2717, 2774, and 1679), and is commonly translated as "giant." The problem scholars have is a simple one: by the time they got around to investigating *Beowulf* the English culture had lost the precise concepts of what orcs and ents were. Tolkien was able to devise details for the Anglo-Saxon monsters.

De Camp also briefly mentions Merlin's role as the good wizard (page 82) and discusses the possibility of Gandolf's "angelhood." Medieval oral tradition, perhaps as early as the 9th century, seems to have embued Merlin with a similar status. The Merlin one reads about in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* is probably the result of an earlier synthesis of two characters. One was an insane wild man of the forest who ran around with a pig and foretold the future. The other was a more mystical character.

Medieval bards (Old English scops) apparently solved the white wizard versus Christian theology problem in the following manner. Satan, jealous of Christ's success, determines to create an anti-Christ. He (or, in some versions, an under-demon) prowls the earth for a mate. He finds an isolated woman and brutally rapes her, leaving her with child. In his evil lust, however, Satan makes a mistake. The woman is a nun. She travels to a nunnery, secures the aid of a priest and has her baby baptized immediately upon his birth. The Holy Spirit enters the child, who thus has supernatural powers and yet is a servant of God. The child is Merlin. This is how medieval bards solved the problem of Merlin's "angelhood," and how, centuries later, the forces of good in C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* can hope to use Merlin every bit as much as the evil forces can hope to use him.

Gandolf suffers, perhaps, from the same sort of angel versus devil ambiguity. Tolkien's seemingly ambiguous solution for the contradiction is consistent with the medieval sources he used for inspiration.

KIRK H. BEETZ
517 Oxford Circle, Apt. 102
Davis, Ca. 95616

Dear Sir:

After looking over the most recent issue of FANTASTIC (November 1976), I find many interesting things in it. I found the stories very interesting, but nothing really great (That's only my opinion, and some may disagree with me). And I found all your features interesting, as usual. But I am writing to comment on various points.

First off, *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers*. Having only recently read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (due to my dislike of a chapter I read when I was younger), I felt that there were several errors in the plot description/synopsis of both.

In *The Hobbit*, the error involves descriptions of Elrond and Gollum. Although both are right, neither is mentioned in *The Hobbit* itself. Elrond is called an elf-friend and an elf-lord, and Gollum is mentioned as being a small creature.

In the description of *The Lord of*

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Rings, the errors are mostly items t of place at the moment being de-ibed. It is not known that Bilbo es in retirement in Rivendell, that mes up later in the first volume. so, it is not known that Strider/ agorn is the heir to the northern ngdom of Gondor, that also comes later in Volume 1 (I can't spell out e entire name of each volume every ne). Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli do t battle with the Rohirrim until ter in Volume 2. Gollum does not in Sam and Frodo in Volume 3, as it implied; he joins them half way rough Volume 2.

Aside from that, the article told me verything I Wanted To Know About olkien But Did Not Know Where To ook.

Now, there is one other matter on hich I wish to comment. Bruce Mof-tt mentions a magazine called *Od-esy*, which I have never heard of. hat may be because I have never een it in my area (Mid-Hudson Val-ey, New York). I did not see your 0th Anniversary Issue of AMAZING nywhere on the stands until today October 1st, as it says at the top of his letter). The magazines I see regu-arly at various newsstands and nagazine racks are the following: *nalog*, *Galaxy*, *F & SF*, AMAZING, nd FANTASTIC. I have never seen *Oddesy*, nor have I seen magazines dvertised in your pages (*Dragon* and *The Future* are their names). I never aw *Vertex*, but that could be because was looking in the wrong place. I lid see *if*, and bought one issue be-ore it folded. *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (that's one hell of a ong name) has not been released but expect to see it on the racks, be-ause there are mystery magazines by he same publisher there. All in all, I ind that SF magazines are hard to ind and locate.

ROBERT NOWALL
6 Martin Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

The latest information I have is that Odyssey *folded after either two or three issues. It was published in a larger-sized format, and very poorly distributed, which probably accounts for your inability to find it. For further comments on distribution, see my editorial this time.*—TW

Dear Teddy,

Business before pleasure: Laredo no longer receives AMAZING. My annoyed sleuthing has yielded not one single copy, and, as much as I hate to say it, I kind of doubt that it sold out. Thusly, please (a) mention the fact to circulation, and (b) forgive me for not pursuing any commentary that appeared (perhaps—I heard this rumor in San Antonio . . .) in its pages.

The August editorial was superbly well-handled. I must admit a modicum of shame in not considering FANTASTIC as intellectual as these enjoyable disseratations have proven it to be. It is seldom that commentary becomes this interesting—so few of the editorials yield prolonged discussions. It's still quite difficult to get over the genuine deprivation of receiving FANTASTIC on a quarterly basis.

"New-Way-Groovers Stew" was unforgivably tasteless (as is this intended pun). The special issue of *Rolling Stone* devoted to Haight-Ashbury and the viewing of at least one Billy Jack movie probably resulted in its bland setting. the MOR-ish writing style drained the stereotyped (yes, *stereotyped*; I get enough of this silliness in watching the character Marty on "Barney Miller") paperpeople beyond any hope of serious readability. I even guessed the ending . . . but, believe me, a mental hand was desperately trying to find the radio knob and switch channels throughout the story.

Surely de Camp could have sold "Algy" as a Happy Hollisters novel and left the precious/putrid bodily fluids of this reader to chug merrily

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on their inspired way.

Artistic talent I think of in terms of Steve Fabian, Roger Dean, and countless others . . . but decidedly not Richard Olsen! You were quite quick in axing Billy Graham, let's hear what the readers think of a neanderthal who stoops so low as to ape Kiss.

Echoing the opinions of Debra Thrall, I say, "Keep Milhaus in the letter's page where he belongs!"

E. K. Hardt assumes the hardnosed stance of the poor man who has discovered the bitter ways of the world. What an absolute idiot! This man is dangerous, and a confused sexist to boot! "As a longtime reader of Fantasy . . ." he begins, not realizing that what he calls Fantasy (with a capital, no less) is a prose comic book. In response to him I must say: Let's face it—your version of heroic fantasy and Sword & Sorcery are not to be mentioned in the same breath. You read and live in a vicious circle of Gun-Shoot-Glory, which is fantasy, but not of the heroic kind. You further submit to fantasy in the false assumption that confession rags and so forth portray realistic sexual equality as opposed to rehashed stereotypes. The next time you seek to justify your own childishness by pointing the guilt in the direction of Sword & Sorcery, consider the role of women in the field as both writers and characters: Andre Norton, Leigh Brackett, Katherine Kurtz, C. L. Moore and her creation of Jirel of Joiry, Janet Fox and Arcana (whatever happened to her?), the REH women in Marvel Comics, . . . to name but a few. By now, Hardt, you're probably emitting a puzzled, "Huh?". Either grow up or get lost.

Notes prior to the close: I detested your ruining Doc Pheonix with such rip-off supporting characters. They shot the entire concept to hell. And, as the devalued peso and beautiful autumn weather turn Laredo into Sleepytown, USA, I remind you that I am not a science fiction fan, but, in fact, an enthusiast who happens read science fiction . . . peek-a-bo Harlan!

BOB ALL
1620 Fremont
Laredo, Texas 780

The assignment (for Weird Hero vol. 2, *Pyramid) was to recreate t feeling of the original, pulp-era D Savage in more modern dress, whi is precisely what Doc Phoenix is. might add that the Doc Pheon novel,* The Oz Encounter, *should out by the time you read this. caveat: I did not write the book a in fact have not even been offered chance to read it before publicatio Although I originally conceived a plotted it, I'm not sure how many my own ideas survived; I'm told no of the prose I supplied was used.*—T

Dear Ted,

There has always been a differen between AMAZING and FANTASTI Perhaps much alike initially (I'm r ferring to the time you took ov editorship), they have split the yo and taken contrasting views on ou look and direction. Ultimately, FA TASTIC has emerged the winner.

I've begun serious collecting both mags, but may quit AMAZING all its issues are as horrible as th September one. The magazine's lo quality can be attributed wholly t the horrendous writing that has gon the route of the recently-fashionabl New-Wave. And to me New-Wav stands for everything I hate in a ba story. Calling them stories would be compliment, as they usually have n begining, middle, or end. The storie are trenchant, mirthless, possessin sick moralization expounded throug the mouths of dreary, uninspirin characters. and often choked-wit compounded, over-embellished imag ery. It's probably true that writer these days want to mold themselve into Harlan Ellisons, Samuel R. De lanys, and Bob Silverbergs. Mayb

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hey should go back and read the id-fifties, early sixties work of night, Simak, Bester, and Laumer. ou may think science fiction has rogressed far beyond "Country of he Kind" and "Starcomber" but it asn't, and the droll backwork of hese New-Wave writers aren't help- ng things any.

FANTASTIC is the opposite. Here tories are still stories. The November ssue is an excellent showcase of good vriting. To begin with there is Fred aberhagen's "White Bull." From the ery beginning the tale is presented vith a succinct, light narrative that ails to become convoluted in lengthy, oring wordage. Conversely, it does ot give an impression of incomplete- ess. The story has plenty of depth within its tight framework, and re- minded me of Phil Farmer's writing tyle, which manages to convey the uthor's thoughts in a precise, yet at- ractive manner. As for characteriza- ion, Theseus and Daedalus are not exactly spanking new. The former is he archetypical embodiment of rash, forceful youth, while Daedalus represented all that is prudent and pragmatic in experienced age. Of course, who needs any supposedly devastating revelations in a fictional character. Usually mankind's own basic traits are good enough to tread on. Certainly natural man suits this tale. The Bull represents a subtle fu- sion of Chariots of the Gods Mythos, handing some originality to what otherwise might have been standard s/s fare. Moreover, Saberhagen spices his tale up with enough humor to make everyone happy, lending the Grecian microcosm an air of contem- porary thoughtfulness only hinted at by the ancient philosophers. In my opinion, "The White Bull" was a quite intelligent re-working of an old classic.

"Parker Frightened On A Tight- rope" reads almost like a vague, dis- embodied recording. It is closer to AMAZING fare than anything else in this issue, but manages to weave its way through a self-proposed maze of pretentiousness. Robert Thurston is one of the more jazzy writers doing sf work nowadays. His stories are actu- ally very frail; most of his concentra- tion seems to go in for depth in cere- bral dialogue. Thurston also manages to use very few words to paint satisfy- ing images for his tales. "Parker" is good sf/fantasy, a rather choppy, cir- cuitous discourse on an uncaring sonafabitch, but still interesting. However, Thurston should not press his luck too much. One of these days he's going to eventually find his dank pit of triteness with the extremely personal mainstreamish sf he's doing. Good luck, Bob.

Brian Lumley's "Tharquest and the Lamia Orbiquita" is back on the right track. I have never read "The Bur- rowers Beneath", but I have been ad- vised to steer clear of H.P. Lovecraft pastichers, and considering the Rhode Island Recluse wasn't so great in his own right, I'd guess that I'd be wise to follow the advice. Here, though, Lumley has written a satisfying tale of devilish ensorcellment, if somewhat campily written. His persistant use of the word "aye" was annoying to say the least. Once again, not anything incredibly new, but handled very, very well, especially the lamia's at- tacks on Tharquest in her castle. Of course I had guessed the supposed shock ending, even if the last page wriggling around from Lumley did catch me a bit off guard. The influ- ence of the old horror pulpsmiths is clearly evident. Lumley is good, but not great. A series featuring Thar- quest might be in order. [*But the point of the story was Tharquest's death!*—TW]

I read Thongor's origin story a few months ago and liked it. As with most origin stories, it was a bit monoto- nous, but it was a likeable prelude to this ish's fine "Black Moonlight." Here is another of Lin Carter's starkly painted red and black tales of incredi-

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ble vallor and insidious evil. I had heard somewhere that Carter's writing was extremely plodding, intricate to a fault, but here I can see no evident of it. Perhaps he is crippled trying to imitate a best inimitable Edgar Rice Burroughs style. For "Moonlight" Carter gave us dramatic vision after dramatic vision. Here was prose dynamic and enthralling for its savage beauty. It was what Brian Lumley might be able to do if he relinquishes the shackles of Lovecraftian verbosity. In addition to fine writing, which might just be the equal of some of Howard's better work, is a grand, eerie adventure plot. Of course there was a flourish of repetition spread throughout, but it could generally be ignored. Lin Carter writes dynamite sword and sorcery. In fact, this might be his own personal "Queen of the Black Coast."

The one story I didn't like this ish was Dennis More's "The Forest of Andred." The damn thing was just too much of a bitch to get into, what with its rambling, tedious prose. I wasn't prepared to knock my brains out trudging through such thick muck, so I dismissed this one with a wrinkled nose.

Artwise, Ultimate is still tops, though you could get more use out of DeVatie and Sternbach. Dou Beekman is just another pastiche For the September AMAZING he cam up with a Jeff Jones, now he's emulat ing Boris Vajello. The pastichers don even have the decency to copy Fran Frazetta anymore, they're doing thei peers' work. As far as I'm concerned Steve Fabian and Richard Olson ma be fabulous, but we'll never hav another Virgil Finlay. Steve's illos fo this ish were sad, and Olson turned i what looked like a rush job. It woul seem that once artists make a rep fo themselves, they begin to scew of and don't give a horse's cock wha their work looks like. And finally Tony Gleeson's Thongor illo was only fair. The original delineator, Mike Nally, should have done the sequel to Carter's "Black Hawk of Valkarth." I won't mention that Doug Beekman's Briam Lumley story illo was putrid.

I deplore the fact that FANTASTIC has gone quarterly, but what can you do? I'm not against new innovations in sf, but only when they're done well. For instance, Robert F. Young's "Perchance to Dream" was an example of great new innovation.

DENNIS DALEY
2115 N. California Ave.
Chicago, Ill. 60647

Fantasy Books (cont. from page 118)

warmly human, stupid, crank, kindly little people survive to point the message that Man's first need is to understand and respect the other person and that the effect of all absolutes, as interpreted by human beings, is catastrophic.

As Mr. Bony, the narrator, says, "God's either wholly inexperienced or else completely and criminally destructive."

But simply because God is the most easily satirized figure in the world and because all the clashes in this book are predictable (Napoleon is also satirized, next to God perhaps the easiest mark), it does not come as richly and warmly alive as *War with the Newts*.

—FRITZ LEIBER

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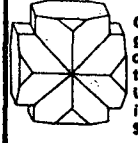

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Vengeance Is Mine (cont. from page 59)

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"I admit it," I said. Their startled gazes turned to me with fresh awareness. "I fired the shot. I freely admit it. I shot and killed Herbert L Foreman." I had them now—a full confession over network TV would cinch it for them, or so they thought. "It was God's Will," I said to the staring camera, "an Act of God, whose instrument I am as surely as the handgun you hold."

I smiled at them. "Prepare thyselves to meet thy Maker," I told the millions of watching viewers.

Then both the Schnikkle TN-4 and I winked out of existence.

—TED WHITE

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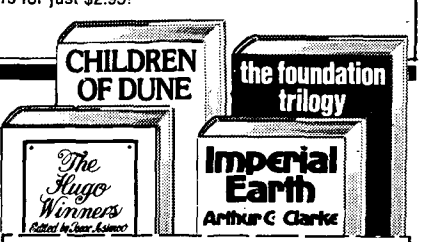

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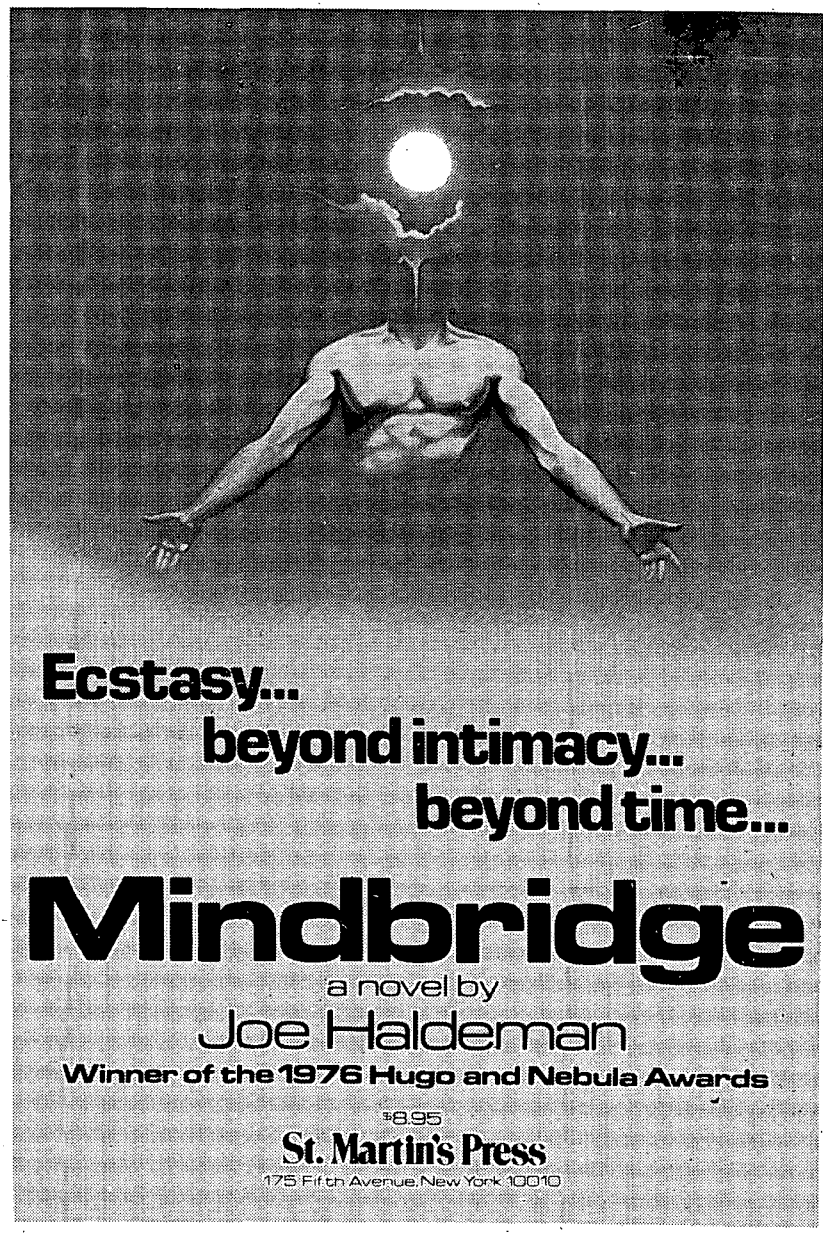

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